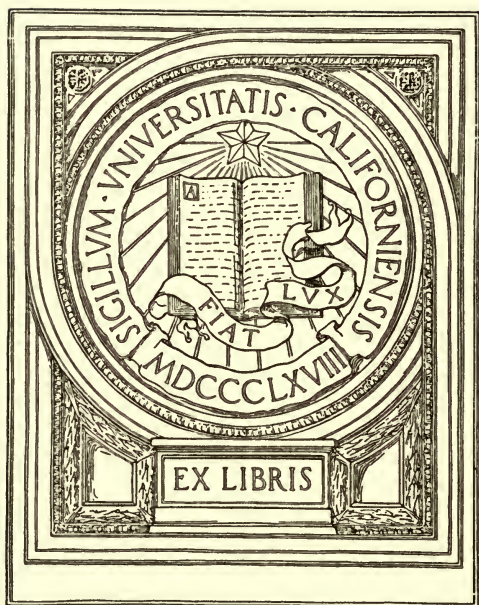


The Toll of the Sands



Paul De Laney



EX LIBRIS

961
D337
+

100

The Toll of the Sands

**A Story of Love and Adventure in the Great Gold
Rush into the Death Valley Country**

NOTE TO THIRD EDITION BY JUDGE
BEN B. LINDSEY

When the juvenile court was first organized Paul De Laney was the courthouse reporter for a leading Denver newspaper. In those early days of the court the doors of my chambers, in the most secret examinations, were never closed to Mr. De Laney. He never published the things that should not be published, and those matters that should be published that would help the young court in those days, and the young who were so unfortunate as to be the subject of the court, he handled with a delicacy and a truthfulness that were of much aid to the court and humanity.

When the first editions of *THE TOLL OF THE SANDS* were issued I was absent from Denver and did not get to see a copy until several days after the publication, but I felt that Mr. De Laney would handle the subject embodied in a Western novel in the proper manner and in the proper spirit. My wife and I have since read the novel and we find it one, not only true to the West and the Western type of life, but one full of genuine interest from the first to the closing paragraph. It is a plain story of the great West that will live.

BEN B. LINDSEY.

Denver, Colorado, February 20, 1920.

A collection of 100 small, stylized figures arranged in a grid-like pattern, representing the 100th day of school. The figures are arranged in a 10x10 grid, with each row containing 10 figures and each column containing 10 figures. The figures are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with each row containing 10 figures and each column containing 10 figures. The figures are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with each row containing 10 figures and each column containing 10 figures.

THE TOLL OF THE SANDS.



The Toll of the Sands

By

PAUL DE LANEY

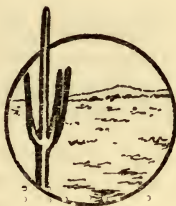
||

Author of

"The Lord of the Desert," "Toilers of the Columbia,"

"The Sheepherder," "Death Valley Scotty,"

"Jayhawkers of '49." Serial Stories Published in Pacific Coast Periodicals



THIRD EDITION

Illustrated by

PAUL GREGG

Denver

The Smith-Brooks Printing Company

COPYRIGHT 1919
BY PAUL DE LANEY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
PRINTED FEBRUARY 20, 1920

no xvii
almsoul

To Kathryn

My dear little wife, who shared with me the pleasures and inconveniences incidental to our honeymoon spent on the border of Death Valley in just such a mining camp as is described in this story.

M18930

Introductory

Paul De Laney is no swivel chair author of the West with a fiction factory at Greenwich Village. He belongs to the Southwest. It is in his blood. He was part of the rough-and-tumble frontier life of which he writes. He knows the dry and arid land where the hot winds blow and the dust devils whirl. For years he lived the life whereof he writes with such truth and enthusiasm. The result is a picture of the Nevada desert—the desert of gray sage, of greasewood, of whirling dust and blinding heat—that makes the blood sting and the imagination run real. Its atmosphere is genuine, its characters stand out life-like and vivid. He writes with conviction because the call of the desert has been burnt into him during the years in the frontier camps that claimed his early manhood. His story is a tale of hot and easy youth. The prospector, the gambler, the wildcatter, the "bad man," the honest miner; all of these walk with amazing vigor through the pages of "The Toll of the Sands." This is a tale for men, but it is one that women too will read eagerly, for the love story which runs like a fine thread through the novel makes its own charming appeal to those who want their adventure to lead toward the golden gates of love.

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE.

Denver, Colorado,
December 20, 1919.

CONTENTS.

Chapter	Page
I. IN DEFENSE OF A WOMAN.....	9
II. OFF FOR DEATH VALLEY.....	23
III. CAST IN BY THE SANDS.....	36
IV. THE DEVIL IN THE MAN.....	44
V. THE DEVIL BREAKS OUT.....	55
VI. THE RUSH	64
VII. THE WIDENING OF THE GULF.....	76
VIII. VISIONS OF MOKAVA.....	90
IX. WHAT FLUNKY OVERHEARD.....	98
X. MR. HORATIO STALLINGS.....	107
XI. MRS. MOORING AND HER DAUGHTER ARRIVE	115
XII. ROBERT RAY MEETS RUBY MOORING..	127
XIII. A TRIBAL LEGEND.....	139
XIV. OSTRACIZED	148
XV. AN ENTERTAINMENT AND A FIGHT...	159
XVI. THE FLEECING OF MOKAVA.....	175
XVII. STALLINGS AND RAY RECEIVE LETTERS	186
XVIII. RAY BREAKS BAD NEWS AND RECEIVES WORSE	197
XIX. A SHOT FROM THE DARK.....	207
XX. ROBERT RAY ARRESTED.....	216

Chapter	Page
XXI. "DEATH VALLEY OR DEATH".....	227
XXII. SHADOWED BY A MAN WITH A GUN..	239
XXIII. A NOTE AND A PICTURE.....	255
XXIV. THE TRIAL OF RAY AND MOKAVA....	266
XXV. FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF THE SANDS..	274
XXVI. RAY SEEKS MOKAVA.....	282
XXVII. THE LAND OF FIRE.....	291
XXVIII. DISCLOSURES OF TWO WRITINGS....	300
XXIX. THE PROSPECTOR	313
XXX. REV. HENRY GWYNNE.....	324

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
(Frontispiece) THE TOLL OF THE SANDS.....	281
“Is he dead?” gasped the young woman, as she rushed from the lounge and unconsciously grasped Ray’s hand	16
“Yours, Robert!” she replied, as he drew her closer to him and gave her a long, parting kiss	285
“It is Robert, Father—Robert Ray!” she ex- claimed	319

The Toll of the Sands

CHAPTER I

IN DEFENSE OF A WOMAN

ROBERT RAY came out of a water-front restaurant. He paused on the sidewalk. A crude sign over a low stairway caught his eye. It bore the information that a room was for rent upstairs, and that the price was fifty cents. It was early, but he was tired—tired as a strong, athletic young man ever gets. He had scaled the most rugged peaks of the Rockies and trained and won honors in the athletic sports of a mining school in Colorado, but one day in San Francisco had fitted him for an early bed—his feet were not accustomed to the limitless streets and their countless curves and grades.

Looking at the sign for a moment he entered the hole-like opening below it. At the head of the dark stairway he found an empty hall lighted by a smoky lamp. There was no call-bell. The glimmer of a dull light through a dusty transom was the only sign of occupancy. He went to the door and knocked. It was opened cautiously by a young woman who stood timidly, half-concealed behind it. She held an

old-fashioned lamp in one hand, while she gripped the doorknob impulsively with the other.

"Beg your pardon," he faltered with cap in hand, "but I noticed downstairs that there is a room for rent?"

"The landlady is not here," came in modest tones. "Oh, I remember! She left the key to the next room, which is for rent, with mother; and mother and father are out, but I will show you the room."

"I shall thank you, as I am pretty tired, and wish to catch an early morning boat," he replied.

The young woman—she was not over twenty, and Robert Ray thought he had never seen one prettier—brought a key and unlocked the door. She lighted a lamp which sat on a rickety table near the bed, and looked at Ray for his approval of the room. It was satisfactory and he paid the price required. He noticed a tinge of red on her cheeks as she thanked him for the money and closed the door behind her.

Ray took off his coat and sat down to meditate over the experiences of the day a few minutes before going to bed. He leaned back in the unsteady chair, pulled his cap down over his eyes and was soon in dream-thought. The real purpose of his trip had been a failure, but it was not far off the route to the Nevada gold fields, and anyway, he had visited the Golden Gate, so christened by the gold-seekers of '49. Would the trail from this point lead him to fortune or failure? Then the vision of the pretty girl rose before him, and optimistic youth interpreted it as a good omen.

She had seemed to be afraid? Girls in cheap rooming houses were usually the reverse. But she had trembled when she first answered his call at the door, and when he gave her the money she seemed embarrassed. She was a novice, at least as a landlady, he concluded.

Ray was still musing when he heard a heavy foot-step in the hall. Then it alternated between a tip-toe sound and a heavier tread. Then there was a succession of irregular taps on the door next to his. A heavier rap followed. Receiving no response, the rap was repeated impatiently. Ray leaned forward tensely in his chair. Blows that shook the wall followed. The door opened cautiously.

"Father is not here," came the trembling voice of the girl.

"I know it," replied a man in a hoarse voice.

"Neither is mother," explained the girl in a more frightened tone.

"I know that, too—that is why I came!" replied the man, confidently.

The girl attempted to close the door, but a hand or foot held it ajar. Then it began to give way. The lighter feet were slipping on the floor.

Ray leaped to his feet.

"Do not come in until father and mother return—they will soon be here," pleaded the girl.

There was no reply, but the door was being forced.

"Go—please go!" begged the girl.

The door was gradually yielding.

"Why doesn't she call—she knows I am here?" muttered Ray.

The resistance at the door gave way and a scuffle followed in the room. A chair toppled over, and Ray rushed out into the hall. The door to the other room had been closed, but the light still shone over the transom. A suppressed shriek reached Ray's ears and he turned the knob and entered the room. A big athletic fellow was standing with his back to the door, holding in his arms like a vise the young woman from whom Ray had rented the room. She was resisting desperately.

Ray leaped at the man and tore his big arms like a garment from about the girl. She reeled, dazed and exhausted, and settled down on a lounge. The big fellow turned upon Ray with a puzzled glare. His great hands relaxed for a moment and his eyes were blinking as if suddenly awakened.

"Who invited you into this?" asked the ruffian.

"The defense of the weak," replied Ray, oblivious of the dramatic sound of his words.

"Then run along about your own business—you doubtless heard about the fellow who made a fortune tending to his own affairs?" warned the fellow, mockingly.

"I shall remain here until you leave, or the young lady tells me to go," replied Ray.

"No, you will go without delay—now!" boasted the bully, quietly preparing for the attack. His eyes were now as wide open as the narrow slits which encircled them would permit, and he steadied his big

form for action. The thickness of his speech still indicated the effects of drink.

"Fighting is a favorite pastime of mine," he continued, removing his coat. "This young cat scratched me and her claws are irritating. It will be a relief to exercise my muscles a little, and at the same time do the community a service by punishing a buttinsky who seems to be looking for trouble that don't belong to him," coolly rolling up his sleeves as if about to perform an ordinary chore.

It was unfortunate for the big fellow that Ray's eyes were partially concealed by his cap. Their old steel gray was returning. It was a bad sign for an antagonist. Those who knew Ray always watched his eyes. His friends had often remarked that there was a certain point when Ray was angry at which his eyes emitted white sparks. At that time, they contended, it was too late to quit and useless to continue a physical contest with him.

But he had cooled in a measure after releasing the girl from the bully, and this had misled the big fellow. He had interpreted the placid expression on the young man's face as an evidence of timidity, and thought that when Ray saw his brawny arms and big shoulders stripped for action he would leave. But these had a different effect on Ray. The big hands had just been used against the helpless little woman lying over on the lounge.

But why this fight? meditated Ray. He saw from the confident air of the big fellow that it would be difficult to avoid, if Ray remained. Should he

now walk out and leave the ruffian master of a situation of which Ray could only guess? He glanced again at the young woman. She was now crying. The big fellow started toward Ray, slowly but confidently, as if about to eject a common intruder.

Ray heard a noise at the lounge. He glanced in that direction. The young woman had risen. There was alarm in her face. Her hands were raised toward them. The big fellow quickened his step. The girl rushed between them. Ray's antagonist stopped suddenly and shoved the girl aside with an oath. Then he struck at Ray with a swinging blow. Ray ducked, caught him with a stinging cut on the cheek, and then took the girl gently by the shoulders and seated her on the lounge.

"Keep out of the way, young lady—you might get hurt," cautioned Ray. "Permit me to settle this matter alone with him," continued Ray, returning to the fray with a step as light as that of a panther.

Ray's cool gallantry in seating the girl increased the fury of the big fellow. A scowl passed over his dark features as he advanced again. Ray again glanced at the girl. She was looking on with terror.

"Say, this is no place to continue this brawl," he ventured, even while his antagonist was about to spring at him. "Let us leave this room. I will go with you anywhere and fight—if fight you must! That young woman should not witness any more ruffianism tonight."

"Then go—get!" scoffed the bully. "Or in the

next minute or so they'll have to cart you out—I'm at home here and you are the buttinsky."

"I shall not leave until she says so," replied Ray, looking at the girl for approval.

"Take that!" growled the big fellow, rushing at Ray and attempting a foul blow.

Ray darted aside like a flash and struck him on the cheek as he passed.

"Dirty pup!" roared the big man, losing all self-control as he attacked again.

Ray ducked his head and leaped aside like a tiger, his eyes flashing the old steel gray. The big fellow now came at him like an avalanche. Ray crouched for an instant. It was a position peculiarly his own. His poise was so deceptive that in the twinkling of an eye he could change his position and strike from a direction entirely contrary to that expected by an adversary, and the blow came with a force and accuracy that was irresistible. The big fellow's fist had passed wild above Ray's head. Ray landed at a point under the fellow's jaw. It was as effective as it was scientific. The ruffian straightened and quivered for a second, like an animal shot through the heart. Then he fell, top-heavy, his head striking the corner of the lounge, near where the young woman was sitting. There was a sharp sound, as if bone and metal had come in contact, and the big form stretched limp on the floor!

Ray leaned over the bulky body and looked into the glassy eyes. Then he felt the pulse of the hairy

wrist. A blank expression came over the young man's face.

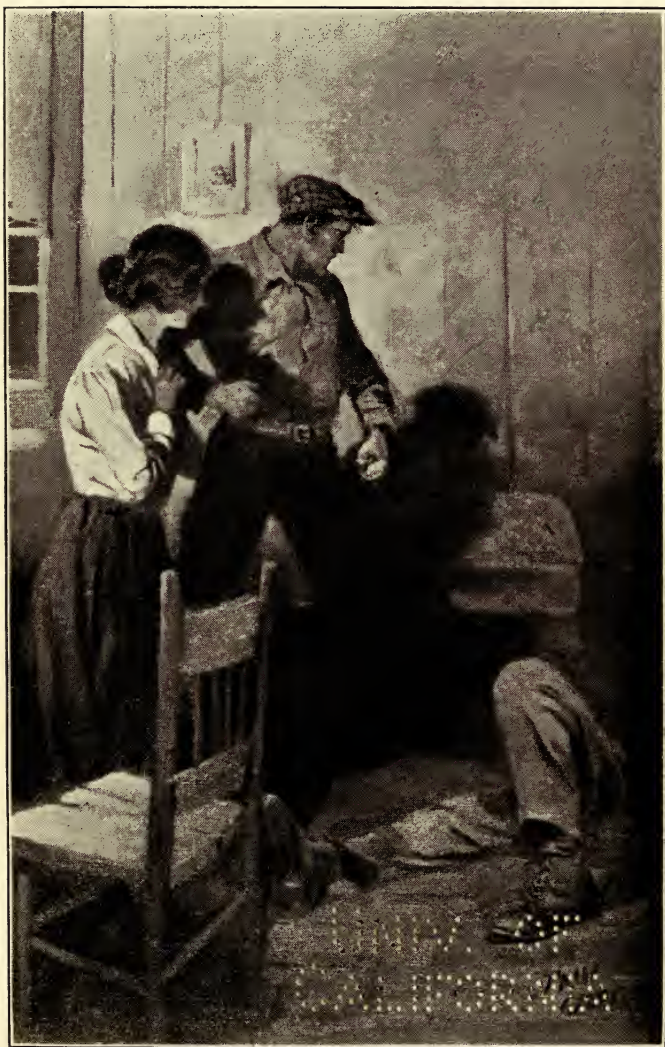
"Is he dead?" gasped the young woman, as she rushed from the lounge and unconsciously grasped Ray's hand.

"I—I—I hope not," he replied almost in a whisper.

"But you are not to blame—you did it all for me!" she said with returning strength. "I will take all responsibility—no one will know you were here—leave—run—I'll say he came here drunk and fell—anything to shield you—it is justifiable."

Ray looked at her for a moment in silence. Could one so young and innocent-looking tell a falsehood—concoct a deliberate lie on the impulse? Was the lie natural with women, as he had heard older men say? But the man had attacked her. She was alone. Ray had come to her rescue, and then had defended himself. She was moved by the impulse of gratitude. The law of nature and the law of the land was with him. But how would he extricate himself? Why did the fellow come to the room—possibly he had the right there? No, that could not be! Such a man and such a woman could have no interest in common. Her honor had been at stake. Her good name was doubtless now involved?

"I have it," said Ray, seizing the big form by the shoulders and dragging it to the hall and into his own room. The girl brought the fellow's hat and laid it near his head as Ray straightened out the body. Ray then grabbed his own coat and the two left the room. Ray then locked the body in and threw the key over



THERE WAS A SHARP SOUND AS IF BONE AND METAL HAD
COME IN CONTACT, AND THE BIG FORM STRETCHED,
LIMP ON THE FLOOR.

the transom. Then he turned and looked into the girl's face.

"This is unfortunate on your account," he said in a low tone.

There were footsteps below.

"You must go!" warned the girl.

"As soon as I have gone," instructed Ray, extending his hand, "call the police—tell them to bring a surgeon—that you heard some one fall in the next room—that some one is hurt—seriously hurt!"

"And you are going?" she asked, as Ray started toward the stairway.

"You suggested it!" he replied.

"Yes—you must go!" she continued, as the steps halted at the foot of the stairway. "But where will you go?"

"On my journey—but to bed somewhere for the remainder of the night."

"But—shall—when shall I see you again?"

"Probably at the trial, if the officers get me. They may summon you as a witness."

"For you, but never against you—but stay—I'll bear the blame—it was all on my account—I will tell the whole truth; that will exonerate you, and as for me—"

"No, I will make my getaway—you must lay it on me, or better, do as I said before. Tell them that you only heard a noise in the next room. He deserved it, and besides, I didn't intend to—"

The footsteps had started up the stairway.

"The key—they knew it was here—how shall I explain that?" she asked.

"You can't—I'll stay," said the young man.

"No. No—you must leave!" she begged, now almost hysterically. "The way you have said is the best. I'll tell them he came in drunk—that I gave him the key—that after he had entered the other room and locked the door I heard him fall. Anything, my brave friend, to shield your connection with this matter. You have only done your duty!"

Ray looked at her thoughtfully.

"If concealing the truth is ever justified, it is in this case. Come in quickly!" she continued, seizing his hand and drawing him into her room. The steps were approaching the head of the stairway.

The girl now showed woman's inherited tact in emergency. She closed the door quickly and locked it. She placed her fingers on the little thumbscrew of the lamp to extinguish the light, but before turning it looked up into Ray's eyes for a moment. In that minute he discovered a great transformation. The shrinking, timid girl of their first meeting less than an hour before had developed into a brave, self-possessed woman. The exciting ordeal had done the work of years. But she had not lost a single charm. To her beauty and modesty had been added the grace of self-reliance.

After turning out the light she touched his arm and he followed her shadowy form to the other side of the room. She raised the window shade cautiously, then the sash.

"Lower yourself to the roof," she whispered. "It

is not far. Hurry—find your way to the rear and let yourself down into the alley. It is simple—go!”

Ray hesitated. There was a knock at the door. The girl took him by the arm and urged him through the open window. Another knock, strong and metallic, came at the door. Ray stepped down on the roof. The girl was holding his hand to direct him.

“Hurry!” she again admonished as another rap came impatiently on the door. Then she released his hand after an assuring grasp.

“One moment!” she whispered. “Where do you go? How may I communicate with you? I must let you know results!”

“I am on my way to the Nevada gold fields—”

“Father is going there, too,” she interrupted. “He will catch the first boat tomorrow. I will accompany him across the bay to the train, and try to see you and communicate by word or sign.”

As the sash and shade closed behind him, Ray stopped for a moment to accustom his eyes to the darkness. A small street light off to the right flickered like a distant star on a hazy night, while a steady glow far overhead from the better lighted portion of the upper town darkened the shadows about him. He moved on cautiously toward the rear of the roof, picking his way thru the skylights and flues and over the rubbish that had been thrown from the windows above.

At the end of the roof he found the descent comparatively easy. He was about to let himself down into the alley when he heard the window sash in the rear rise again. At the same time he saw a dark

form come out from below and take a stand against the wall on the opposite side of the alley. Then a stream of light shot out from the window which he had just left, and a helmeted head followed. Ray stretched himself out on the roof like a leech. He knew the policeman had not observed him, and hoped he had escaped the eyes of the figure below.

The policeman crawled out on the roof and stood for a moment to get his bearings. Ray had never been so nervous before. Whether to leap and take chances with the figure below or rise and surrender, or grapple with the officer was the question. The statue-like form of the officer began to move slowly toward him. It was time to act!

But why run? What was his crime? He had come to the defense of a helpless woman, and then was forced to defend himself. All of the laws of God and man were with him. But the young woman? What would it mean for her? Could it be explained without compromising her in some way? But the ruffian had said that he was at home—that Ray was the intruder! But she told him to go! He would do as she wished. The form still was watching from below. The policeman was now near him.

"Steady, my boy!" his old inner-self spoke. Every nerve was at high tension.

"Of—fi—cer!"

It was in a soft, confiding voice, and came from the open window. Ray turned his head cautiously and saw the form of the young woman leaning through the opening.

"Yes," replied the policeman.

"It is useless to search out there," she said. "My mind is collected now. Come in and I will explain the whole matter."

The policeman peered about for a moment and then returned through the open window. The sash was quickly lowered and Ray noticed that the hands that lowered it were shapely and small.

* Ray now determined on no further delay. He looked below and saw the dark form move over toward his side of the alley and enter an opening just beneath. Then he heard the creaking of rusty hinges.

"A Chinese laundry!" he smiled. "It was John Chinaman who had been disturbed by the noise on the roof."

As Ray dropped down into the alley he heard the ringing of a gong and the sound of horses' feet. They were over on the street in front of the restaurant. Then the horses stopped. A storm of footsteps on the stairway followed. Then a clamor in the hallway. Ray crossed the street and looked up to the roof. The window sash shot up in the window he had left and men began to pile out through the opening.

He looked up and down the alley quickly. There was a shadowy light at the upper end. The lower was even darker than the night. He started on the run toward the blackness.

A half shout, half scream came from the opening where the Chinaman had entered. The Mongolian was giving the alarm! Ray ran in a half-hearted manner, like one doing something of which one is ashamed.

At the end of the alley he came to a high wall. He heard water splashing against it below.

Then he looked back. The officers of the law were lowering themselves into the alley from the roof which he had just left.

CHAPTER II

OFF FOR DEATH VALLEY

ROBERT RAY paused for a moment to watch the officers. There were four of them. After a short consultation two started toward the lighted end of the alley, and the other two came toward him. It was now a mere chance of luck, and he began to grope his way along the wall toward the north. He soon came to an old abandoned wharf. Stopping behind an abutment of the structure, he watched for his pursuers. When the two shadows reached the point he had just left, Ray saw them stop again. They stood for several seconds. Then, to his great relief, they started toward a dim light at the other end of the wall.

Ray then groped his way along the old wharf. He finally came to a point from which he could see small lights glimmering off to the West, and struck across lots toward these. He ran into heaps of rubbish and holes which made progress difficult. Then he came upon low board structures that were divided by narrow, uneven lanes. Following one of these until it intersected with a wider street, he came to a cheap rooming-house sign, and entered the place. A drowsy man, dressed in a sailor's uniform, sat by a rickety table. He showed Ray to a room, which reminded him of his old prospecting cabin in Colorado.

"Wake me for the 7 o'clock Oakland boat!" he

called as the sailor-looking landlord closed the door with an awkward military salute.

Ray found sleep out of the question at first. The scenes of the previous few hours forced themselves before him like pictures on a screen. The pretty girl at the door with the old lamp, half concealing herself through fear; the arrival of the ruffian; the fight; the big hulk of a form limp on the floor; the escape thru the window, and the assuring grasp of the girl as they parted; her call to the officer on the roof when the crisis was at hand; his flight and the pursuit.

Then he was looking through bars, and the tread of a watchman was outside. The young woman was sitting, bowed, in a chair, and her big brown, tearful eyes were gazing at Ray. There was a heavy pounding somewhere, as if the place was being assaulted. Then it was at his cell door!

"Hurry up for your 7 o'clock boat!" a hoarse voice called.

When Ray came out on the street he was in a second-hand business district. The few people stirring looked at him in a suspecting manner. He entered a store and purchased an old slouch hat, throwing his cap away later. Then he bought a morning paper and entered a restaurant. Scanning the columns carefully while eating a short breakfast, to his delight he found no account of the previous night's tragedy.

At the ferry house he secured his suitcase and rifle from the check stand and rushed on to the Oakland boat.

Though there were plenty of seats, he walked

through to the Oakland side of the boat. He wanted to observe those seated in the rear. Easing himself down in a seat, facing the amphitheatre, dotted here and there with passengers, he looked anxiously for the girl of the night before.

"There she is!" he exclaimed, mentally, after a casual survey of the passengers.

She had not seen him—at least she had not recognized him, though she sat facing him to the right. She was accompanied by a woman and a man. The man, probably fifty, sat nearest the aisle, the woman, near the man's age, sat next. The woman was talking at a rapid rate to the man, who occasionally nodded or shook his head mechanically, as if merely keeping time to the one-sided conversation. The girl was even more indifferent. Her big brown eyes wore an expression, so sad, so anxious, that it would have spoiled her beauty but for their innocence and the pretty face which they lighted. Her classic features and tender expression gave her the appearance of a stranger to her companions. But for the fact that her flood of dark hair fluffed out in a manner similar to that of the elder woman, and he heard her address the other as "mother," Ray would have concluded that they belonged to a different world.

The young woman was already Ray's idea of a facsimile of the goddess of beauty. She had scarcely left his mind since she had opened the door for him the previous night. But the elder woman, with her lean, hard features—mouth with drooping corners—her piercing, expressionless black eyes, reminded him

of his conception of how a real fury looked. Still he was forced to conclude that a trace of refinement still lingered behind the mask which time had placed on her face.

Ray watched the girl cautiously. He was anxious to catch a glance that might indicate the fate of the ruffian.

"She should have recognized me as I strode by when I entered the boat," he thought. "No, this hat—and she saw me only by the dim light last night. Jove, I was mistaken!"

He smiled. She had given him a glance of recognition, but her eyes turned quickly into space again. Her glance was accompanied by a faint smile, though it was a sad one. Ray felt the impulse to rush to her, but it quickly vanished, as the girl's eyes turned warningly toward her companions.

For a time the young woman appeared to be oblivious of the world and those about her. She seemed to be living on another sphere. Ray thought he saw a cloud pass now and then on her pretty face, but her eyes still shone as clear as stars through a rift in a dark cloud. Then after a time he heard her voice again. And such a voice! It was sweeter even than it was the night before. It came like a breath of zephyr through the hard and seasoned sound that poured in a stream from the other woman's lips.

"Mother, let us speak of pleasant things—father is going away, you know!"

She had interrupted when the elder woman had reached a higher pitch in her tone.

The whistle blew and the boat was jamming into place against the wharf. As Ray rose he caught another glance from the pretty eyes. The buckle of the strap of his rifle case caught in the lattice of the seat and he was delayed in extricating it. The crowd rushed by, shoving one another ahead. In the few seconds the young man was getting his traps together, the girl and her companions had reached the gang plank. Ray caught a glimpse of their backs. The girl was evidently trying to loiter, but the impatient passengers in the rear were forcing her along. Ray tried to rush through but was compelled to take his place in line.

At the end of the gangplank the confusion was greater. Many of the passengers bound for San Francisco were late, and were boring their way into the crowd that was leaving the boat. In the jumble Ray lost sight of the girl and her parents. The place was now a scramble. Ray realized that the rush to the Nevada gold fields was on. The news of the latest discovery had spread like wildfire, and Californians are quick to stampede for a new strike. They inherited the craze. Whichever way he looked Ray saw a sea of strange heads and faces bobbing about like debris on a wave.

If he could only have one word. Was the man dead? Who was suspected? He rushed on with the flood of the crowd, looking into every face as he elbowed his way through the throngs.

The man had carried an old-fashioned grip. Ray would recognize it again. But the girl. He had

only to get a glimpse of her. They doubtless were ahead. He watched to the right and the left. They could not have turned aside without his seeing them.

"Hello!" he exclaimed to himself. He had run upon them suddenly. The man was waiting his turn at the steps of the chair car. He kissed the elder woman and turned to the girl. She was looking anxiously in different directions. Just as her father brought her to the knowledge that he was telling her goodbye she discovered Ray again.

Quick as a flash a small faded package dropped near Ray's feet. He picked it up, held it for a moment and then reached out to restore it.

"Thank you," she said hurriedly. "It is not so bad as I feared," she continued, brushing imaginary dust from the package, "though it may yet prove—"

"Daughter!" interrupted the other woman.

"Yes, Mother," she said abstractedly.

"Don't you see your father must hurry—kiss him goodbye!"

The girl turned as if suddenly awakened and received the kiss of the man on her forehead.

"If he lives, tell him to hurry after me, as soon as he is able," instructed the man as he started up the steps of the car.

"Father, you were about to forget our mysterious package," called the girl.

He grabbed the package and hurried on. When he reached the platform of the car he turned and raised his hat to the women. Ray, who was following, did likewise. He was between the man and women,

in such a position that it was necessary to take off his hat, and he bowed as a consequence. As he did so he caught the eye of the young woman again. A sad smile rose with a flush on her cheek, but she turned away instantly, taking the arm of her mother, as the latter called out something to her husband, and the two were instantly lost in the crowd.

The car was crowded and Ray kept close to the elder man as they made their way toward the front. They finally came to an unoccupied seat. The elder man seized it. Ray immediately joined him.

"How far do you travel on this line?" asked the man in the way of an introduction, with a tremor of agitation as he caught Ray's eye.

"To Reno," replied Ray.

"I go as far as Reno, too—change cars there for the Nevada gold strike," explained the elder man. "My name is Mooring—John Mooring."

"We have the same destination in view," smiled Ray, giving his name.

They were companions the remainder of the way. They reached Goldfield in the night, but were separated by the crowd at the depot.

Ray regretted losing his companion. The elder man was experienced in gold rushes and would be able to aid him in the new field. But Ray also wished to keep in touch with him for other reasons. He had hoped that the man would say something about his family—his daughter—something about the episode of the night before they left San Francisco.

But never a word. He had talked only of money and the means of getting it. But he hoped that at

some time he would revert to the subject of the tragical night. If the big fellow should die—Ray was certain from what the girl had said when he had restored to her the package that the fellow was still living when they left San Francisco—but if he should die later, Mooring would certainly be informed, and might disclose the information in some manner.

“Suppose the fellow is dead, or should die?” meditated Ray when alone in his room that night. “Not so bad as I feared—though it may yet prove—” He repeated the words of the girl at the depot. “May prove what?” he asked himself. Then he recalled what Mooring had said on leaving the two women. “If he lives, tell him to hurry after me!”

“If he lives?” continued Ray, meditatively. “Oh, that he may and for more than a year and a day!” he smiled at the rhyme he had jingled.

The idea of becoming crazily infatuated over a girl he had met by mere chance—and by chance had defended—and for whom by chance he might yet have to stand trial for his life! And possibly she might be a married woman, at that? The ruffian was perhaps her husband after all, young and pretty as she was, and villainous and coarse as was the man. Who could tell what a woman would do? Ray had no patience with the old theory of love at first sight. He recalled a few cases of his own experience where there were real excuses for an affair, but they had passed and nobody was hurt. There was not a love throb left in his heart—for them.

“Bosh!” he said, as he arranged to go to bed. “For-

get it, young man; forget it. You have enough on your hands on her account already without raving over a girl who doubtless only remembers you as a handy fellow who chanced her way in an emergency. She never expects to see you again—does not even know your name. But that hand-touch—that assuring grasp as she eased me out into the night. That voice—those eyes—that pretty, angelic face, that queenly form—shut up, you boob! You may have to swing for killing her—lover—perhaps her husband! Wonder what that package contained?" he continued meditatively, after a time.

It was late when he awoke the following morning. A hurried breakfast and he was on the streets and among the crowd. He saw not a face that he knew. He was watching for the companion of his journey. He went to the postoffice later in the day, hoping that he might meet him there. But then he knew it was too early for Mooring to expect mail. The excitement everywhere reminded Ray of his mission. He had just completed a course in the mining school in Colorado and he must now turn theories into practice. His ardor had a quick set-back. He was informed that it was too late to go prospecting; that the water holes had dried up earlier than usual; that it was worth a stranger's life to venture beyond a day's journey from the camp; that all of the ground within that distance had been prospected over and over again, and that every sign of mineral had been staked and recorded.

Ray had wandered about for two days, undecided.

His funds were low to start with, and living in a new mining camp was high. He finally came upon his former traveling companion. The latter was wild with enthusiasm. The crowds had aroused him as the track and a line of competitors excite a horse of the turf. He had gone through every phase of the mining game and felt that the final opportunity had arrived. He had played the loaded dice and won and lost. He had always stayed too long. He would know this time when to quit.

"Hello, my young friend!" exclaimed Mooring. "I have been looking all over for you. I have the scheme—prospecting is the thing! It is out of my line, but it is the chance of a lifetime. It is the only thing left. All of the claims within reach of this place have been taken, organized into companies, and the stock is out of reach. It is up to us. You are the man. You know the mineral when you see it. I know how to put it into cash. All we have to do is to go farther out, stake some ground, incorporate a company, put the stock on the market—and swim! Let's go prospecting!"

"It would suit me, and as you know, I came to prospect," explained Ray, "but they say there is no ground worth while this side of Death Valley, and that it would be suicide to venture into that region at this season of the year, especially for those not familiar with that country."

"I know that it is a bad time to go, so far as weather conditions are concerned," replied Mooring, "but it is a waste of time to linger here. I could possibly

earn my salt at curbstone brokerage, and you could get wages at something, but with the high cost of living here, we might as well be on a farm. Go with me and I will get us both on our feet. Let's get a piece of ground, and I will get the money to develop it. You manage the mine and I will finance it."

Mooring was not as particular about property that would yield as he was about its location. Distance would lend enchantment to value, according to his plans. It was the time of all times, he argued to himself. The prospectors had about all come in, and they would not venture out again until fall. If he and Ray could locate claims beyond the range of the general field he would incorporate a company and sell stock irrespective of values.

"I have inquired about that Death Valley country," explained Mooring. "It is a rich field, and there is enough mystery about the name to sell stock!"

Ray looked at him with a half-questioning expression, but Mooring proceeded.

"Besides, it is inaccessible, and has not been prospected much. There are a number of water holes in the country. I have a map, and if we are cautious we can make it. Why, damn it, young man," he emphasized, "I would go close to hell this summer to get something, rather than lay around camp until fall, and then go out with the rabble. Mining is like fighting—the fellow who gets in the first blow in a new field has a big advantage!"

Two mornings later, as the day was breaking, the two men rode each a burro, out toward the south.

They drove three other burros. Two were loaded with large cans of water, and the other carried provisions.

"Water, they said, is the greatest need," remarked Mooring as they rode along. "If our supply doesn't last until we reach the first water hole, it will be extravagance that exhausts it; with what provisions we have and your rifle's aid, we should not worry about the food supply."

The third day out they met a ragged, sunburned, half-dazed prospector. His lips were swollen and his tongue was barely able to articulate. He pointed to their water cans. They handed him a canteen. He drank from it ravenously.

"This is life," he lisped. "Death is ahead of you. He came near getting me. You better turn back!"

"Isn't there a water hole here?" asked Mooring, pointing to a map which he had drawn from his pocket.

"There was a little when I left," explained the exhausted man, "but it is two days' journey ahead of you, and it was receding rapidly into the earth."

"We'll dig for it," replied Mooring.

"You will have to follow it into the rocks when it leaves the surface," warned the stranger, shaking his head ominously. Then glancing up at the blazing sun, he nodded his head with a look of pity on his sun-blistered face, and proceeded at a snail's pace on his journey.

"Why, these tenderfeet make me tired," said Mooring in an encouraging tone of voice. "It is all in the will-power. We'll show them. Now is the time of

all times. We will have the whole field to ourselves. Fortune awaits ahead. A dull, monotonous camp life lies behind us for the summer. We will have wealth before the season ends!"

Ray looked on the limitless plain ahead. The heat danced in shadows above the baking sands. The burros turned suddenly to follow the departing prospector. Mooring headed them off with a sharp cut of his whip. Ray thought of the confiding face of his companion's daughter. It banished every doubt. The two men forced their burros on toward the desolate region.

CHAPTER III

CAST IN BY THE SANDS

“LET us speak in the pale-face tongue!”
A girl of fourteen placed the tips of the first and second fingers of her right hand to her lips as a sign of silence. Her brother, two years younger, had spoken. Raising her hand for silence again, the girl rose and went to the only door of the little room and looked out. From the door to the small window in the rear she ran noiselessly and again looked out.

“Tehana no hear us now; we may talk a little white tongue,” she said, seating herself on a rug made from the skin of a desert lion. She spoke in a soft, sweet voice that blended with the low sound of the desert wind. Her large black eyes shot glances alternately from the face of the boy to the door, that she might not lose the words that fell so slowly from his lips and at the same time guard against surprise from the outside.

“Why do Tehana care if we speak Mokava’s tongue? Mokava no care if we speak Tehana’s tongue,” inquired the boy, continuing with a spirit of bravado, “when I get to be a brave—a—man, I’ll speak Mokava’s tongue all time!”

“Speak it as low as the wind now, or Tehana will hear you!” cautioned the girl.

“I will not fear Tehana when I am big,” replied

the brother, scarcely above a whisper. "Why may we not speak the tongue of our father? Why do Tehana want us talk like Panamint Joe and Old Mag? I do not like Injun talk. They grunt like big black hog and sing like coyote."

"Sh! They talk and sing in your mother's tongue, my brother. Do not forget. Nevada say love your mother."

"Yes, Nevada just like pale face. That pale face way. Injun no love his mother, his father—nobody. He no care. He eat chuckwalla and rattlesnake like big black hog. White man know heap. Injun know nothing. He no write on paper. He no read book. He always same."

"You know little about white man, Grant. You see only few, and hear Nevada talk. Cowboy here only two weeks when he got leg broke. Surveyor sick longer time, but he leave soon as he get up. Men come in from desert to get water, but go right away. Mokava, he white, but he live like Injun."

"White man no like Injun," persisted the boy. "Nevada no like Injun. No one know she Injun. Her skin white like Mokava's. You like Injun. I like Injun. I love you, Amosa, but I hate Injun."

"We much Injun as white. Mokava, he white; Tehana, she Injun. He, our father; she, our mother. We no hate Injun; we no hate white man. We love all; Nevada say love all," argued the girl.

"I guess I too much Injun," replied the boy, sadly. "I no redder than you, but more Injun than you. I too much like Tehana. She all storm-cloud. You like

Nevada; she like Mokava—all sunshine. You good; but I like Tehana; she like bad spirit, she—”

“Sh! Don’t speak that way. She our mother. Nevada read from book—‘honor father and—’ ”

There were irregular footsteps outside. A shadow darkened the doorway. Then a man fell headlong across the threshold.

The improvement, which consisted of a rough rock house and a small adobe slightly to the rear, with an old smoked tepee farther back, sat beneath some trees on an irregular lawn. The growth was cottonwood and native grass. The habitation was a noted landmark in the desert. Long stretches of restless sand dunes, interspersed with barren hills and mountains of rock lay out in every direction as far as the eye could see. The gurgling spring which gushed forth beneath the green foliage had produced the only vegetation in a vast region of country. The broad-leaved cottonwoods had beckoned many a thirsty wanderer from a grave in the sands. Some had been cast in from the desert, as if from the sea, more dead than alive.

In the rear of the houses was a small garden. This and a large meadow connecting directly with the yard were fenced. The cow lot and burro corral were separated by a rock wall near the spring. All of the improvements were of rock and dirt. There was no other building material in that portion of the country.

When the man fell into the doorway the children were first awe-stricken though they uttered not a word. They thought their mother had come upon them while

they were conversing in English—a crime that meant sure punishment. But true to the inheritance from that same mother, they exhibited no sign of fear.

They approached the prostrate form cautiously. The man tried to speak, but his tongue was swollen until it protruded from his lips. He turned on his side and pointed his hand toward the north. He tried to speak again, but his lips were immovable. He raised the forefinger of his right hand and pointed to his breast and then pointed to the north again. His arm dropped to the floor. He had become unconscious.

“Tehana! Tehana!” shouted the girl and the boy in chorus, as they ran to the tepee in the thicket to the rear.

When they reached her the children spoke hurriedly to their mother, an Indian woman, in her native tongue. She rose slowly from some work and ambled to the front of the rock house. As soon as she had glanced at the man on the floor she spoke, and the boy ran away to the meadow. The girl hurried to the spring.

“Tell Mokava to come,” she had said to the boy. “Bring water!” she had directed the girl, addressing them in her native tongue, as was always her custom.

She had unbuttoned the collar of the shirt of the visitor when Amosa returned with a can of water, and lost no time in applying the fluid to the lips of the stranger with a wet rag. This she dipped repeatedly into the can and squeezed the water out on his lips and forehead, letting it run down on his sunburnt neck and chest. Then she saturated the cloth freshly and wound it about his face, leaving a place for his nose

to inhale the air, while she continued to dip water with her hand and drop it steadily on the brow of the man.

When Mokava arrived, unperceived at first by his squaw wife, he could not resist looking on in silence for a moment. In spite of the aversion which his wife had so often expressed for the white race, save that portion which he embodied, she was yielding to that intuition which is a part of every woman, irrespective of race or color. She was ministering to a distressed human being. The sight awoke in him a heart throb, pride that she had forgotten her prejudice, for the time, at least.

As Mokava joined the squaw the young man—he seemed but little above his majority in years—opened his eyes and attempted to speak. He stared at the woman for an instant and then his eyes fell upon Mokava. An expression of amazement first clouded his face; then it was followed by an expression of contentment as he fell back into a stupor again.

Mokava read the story at a glance. It was a common story out there in the desert. The corduroy trousers, high-laced shoes, empty canteen—another prospector had lost his way, sighted the green trees in the last moment of desperation and reached the place just as he succumbed.

“He pointed in that direction when he came,” explained Amosa in her mother’s tongue, extending her finger toward the north. “He kept trying to tell us about something out there,” she continued, detailing

the visitor's efforts to tell them something before he fell into the first stupor.

Mokava looked out over the shimmering desert with a doubtful shake of his head. But he instructed Amosa to fill a canteen with fresh water from the spring. He saddled a burro hurriedly and rode toward the north. He had no trouble in finding the young man's trail and followed it back as fast as he could force the burro to go.

"He had a companion, doubtless, but I probably will be too late," mused the squaw man. Then glancing back from a rise on the plain he saw his wife bending over the form of the young stranger. "Tehana hates my race, but she has the true heart and soul of a woman," he murmured in her own tongue.

An hour passed before the young man again showed signs of reviving under the care of the Indian woman. She patiently applied the cool water which was kept fresh from the spring by Amosa and Grant. The coolness at the setting of the sun had begun when the stranger again opened his eyes and looked about him. He could move his lips now and tried to speak, but his tongue was too awkward. He attempted the sign language but was unable to make the woman or her children understand. After he had been given a few swallows of water his tongue became more active.

"M—y f—r—friend! W—h—where is h—he?" he lisped, looking about the room a second time.

Tehana spoke to Amosa.

"Mokava—father gone for him," explained the girl,

surprised to have her mother tell her to speak in the white tongue.

"But he was here a few minutes ago!" mumbled the young prospector, gazing at the squaw.

"No, no! No one been here but Mokava, Tehana and Grant and me," explained the girl.

"I'm sure he was here," insisted the young stranger in an indistinct speech. "I have been delirious—out of my head—but I remember when he looked down at me while the woman—the lady—was cooling my head."

Grant now joined in the conversation and he and Amosa explained over and over in their awkward language what had occurred. But the stranger was not convinced that he had not seen the face of his companion after his first temporary revival.

It was long after nightfall when Mokava arrived at his door. He led the burro close to the entrance and called for a lamp. The dim light showed that he had been successful in his errand. A man, still breathing, was tied across the back of the animal. Mokava had first walked by the side of the burro and held the unconscious stranger on, but progress was so slow that he tied the stranger across the saddle and led the way.

The younger man was now revived to such an extent that he rose and assisted Mokava and the squaw in removing the rescued man from the burro to the house. They placed him on a bed covered with soft rugs made from the skins of animals, such as were used almost exclusively in the place.

While they were arranging for his comfort, Amosa, who was holding the lamp, came nearer and its light fell directly upon the face of the unconscious stranger. The young man first looked at the face of his friend and then at that of Mokava. He repeated this a number of times. An exclamation burst from his lips that showed a doubt in his own mind as to whether or not he had yet regained his mental faculties.

"Ugh!" burst forth from the lips of Tehana, the first time her husband had heard her give vent to an expression of surprise for many years.

Amosa and Grant looked back and forth repeatedly between the face of their father and that of the unconscious stranger.

"What's all of this about?" inquired the bewildered settler of his Indian wife in her own language.

She replied in the same tongue, and the surprise grew on the faces of their children.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVIL IN THE MAN

A WEEK had passed since the tragic arrival of Robert Ray and John Mooring at the home of Mokava. Ray had recovered overnight, and was spending most of the time romping among the hills south of the place with Amosa and Grant. Mooring's case had proved more serious but he was now convalescing, though still confined to his bed most of the time.

Their burros had come in the night after their arrival, and Ray and Mokava had gone out the next day and brought in the belongings of the prospectors. The experience of Ray and Mooring had been a common one of the desert at that season of the year. They had found the water hole indicated on Mooring's map, and referred to by the belated prospector whom they met on the third day out. But it was dry, and the water had doubtless gone back to the rocks—at least, they found no evidence of it by digging.

The supply which they had brought along was exhausted while they were trying to reach the retreating fluid that had formerly occupied the vacant hole, and they started out early in the morning to look for another place indicated by Mooring's map. But at the end of two days they found themselves exhausted and bewildered among the limitless sand dunes. While they were camped for the night their burros deserted

them. They left everything behind next morning and struck out on the trail of the burros, hoping that it would lead to water. But it was soon lost in the shifting sands. Mooring later fell by the wayside, and Ray, through the sheer luck that sometimes comes to those in distress, sighted the trees above Mokava's home and staggered into the place.

It was an early forenoon and Robert Ray and the two children were out as usual. Tehana was in her tepee in the rear where she now spent most of her time. She came into the presence of the strangers only when it was necessary. Her distance between them had increased in proportion to the rate of their recovery. Amosa and Grant took advantage of this and fairly lived in the white man's atmosphere. They talked the tongue, heard the stories with which children are so familiar in the great outside world and dreamed and dreamed of the time when they might see it all for themselves.

Mokava was sitting by the couch of Mooring. They had begun to permit the latter to talk now, as he was improving.

"And those burros came in of their own accord," remarked Mooring. "They were faithful, after all. They must have been ashamed at deserting us."

"No, they come for water," smiled Mokava. "Burro all right, though. He never desert man in desert until water gives out. Then after so long he begin to smell for water. He finally gets scent like Injun and starts out. He always find nearest water."

"They say we resemble each other very much, and

"I must admit it," smiled Mooring faintly, after a pause and glancing into a small hand mirror which he had rescued from his pack. "But these things often happen with strangers. I know but little about my ancestry, but there cannot possibly be any relationship between us. My parents started across the plains in early days and became separated. I was taken by friendly immigrants to the Pacific coast. My father and mother and the other children perished on the desert. I have positive proof of this—not one other than myself survived."

"I no know nothing of my family and not much about myself," replied Mokava. "I no know my name. A very old chief may know. He my father—red father. He know where he got me. But he far away—maybe dead. I always lived with Injuns. I first learned little white tongue from white men who come along. They hunt water and find us. Then Nevada, she teach me. She smart girl. You no think her mother squaw. I think she like my mother."

"Our resemblance is one of nature's coincidences, I suppose," continued the invalid, "though they often happen. Men have met for the first time from different portions of the world before who resembled each other like brothers, and yet were far removed from relationship. Ours is a marked case, I must admit, and it must be very noticeable to others. I believe, though, you are older than I?"

"I know not my age, but I must be about half a hundred," replied the settler. "I was grown more'n

twenty-five years ago. Nevada, she is eighteen, and she no born until many years after I took Tehana for wife. I had harder life than you. I slept on ground until I was a man. Lived with Injuns and lived like Injuns. Never had much to eat. I never get use to Injun grub. Nevada learn white ways of cooking and she teach her mother. Tehana no like white ways of cooking, but she good woman. She do as I say. Injun women all do as husbands say. I want to learn more about white man's ways. Nevada, she pass for white. She smart girl. I hope much for her—and Amosa, and Grant."

"Where is Nevada?" asked the visitor.

"She in school—Injun school! Government surveyor come along. He sick here for time. He see what smart girl Nevada was and had 'em send for her. She been home once. She teach Amosa and Grant. Her mother no love her any more as she should. She think children quit havin' Injun ways. Nevada, she come home again this fall, but she no stay. She take Amosa and Grant back with her and teach 'em. She will be teacher then in Injun school. She very smart—"

"Hello pal, look at this!" interrupted Robert Ray, entering the door hurriedly, followed by Grant and Amosa.

"Oh, Mokava! Young pale face—young white man—say Amosa smart girl," broke in Grant.

"He no say such thing," blushed Amosa.

"Wait till he see Nevada—if he could see Nevada?" gloated the boy.

"Pal, pal, look at this!" insisted Ray. He had become more familiar with his companion under their hardships. "If this isn't the real stuff," he continued, exhibiting a handful of rich quartz specimens, "the time I have put in studying minerals has been wasted."

Mooring seized the pieces of quartz and called for his glass. When he had examined each piece critically under the glass, he rose upon the couch, despite the remonstrance of Mokava, his eyes flashing with excitement.

"You're right, Bob; you're right! It will run a thousand dollars to the ton. Where did you find it?"

"Why, it is scattered all over the mountain to the south—just a stone's throw from this place!" replied Ray.

"He took it from your mine," said Grant, addressing his father.

"From Burro Hill?" smiled the settler.

"Yes," nodded the boy.

"I sorry, but you no find anything much," said Mokava.

"Ain't that the real metal?" inquired Ray of Mooring, again fondling the specimens.

"It is certainly good enough for me!" replied Mooring.

"But no enough of it, just little here and there—pockets as miners say," explained the settler. "Small pockets at that," he continued. "I take out little now and then, but just as you think you find heap it play out."

"There is bound to be plenty of it farther down,"

remarked the elder visitor, confidently. "Make out notices, Bob, in yours and my name, and file on it!"

"You had forgotten—it belongs to our host," reminded Ray.

"Has it been staked according to law?" asked Mooring.

"No, but our friend here is in possession," again reminded Ray. "He has done a little prospect work on the ground, too. I did not mean to interfere with his claims, but they indicate a rich country hereabouts. We will doubtless be able to find other good ground that will not conflict with the rights of our benefactor."

"Go stake it—any that you come to! Put up the notices—it belong to whoever first complies with the law!" shouted Mooring, the blood rushing to his face which had bleached to a marble white during his confinement.

Ray stared at his friend anxiously. Could it be that the heat had unbalanced the mind of his companion? He had been told that it often affected men's brains for long periods—that sometimes they never thoroughly recovered.

"I mean it!" exclaimed Mooring, attempting to rise from his bed, and glaring at Ray impatiently. "I'll do it, myself, tomorrow," he continued in a weak voice, as he dropped back on his pillow.

"There is plenty of time, Mr. Mooring," he said soothingly. "When you are able to get out we will then take the matter up with our host and reach terms of some kind that will be fair to him."

"I will be up. Tomorrow we will stake the whole country," declared Mooring, his voice gaining strength.

"There should be no hurry," explained Ray in a persuasive voice. "No one will venture in to interfere. It was only chance that brought us here. Take it easy. It will be several days before you are able to stake ground, let alone travel. The weather is getting hotter every day."

"That ground shall be monumented tomorrow," said Mooring, firmly. "If you don't care to join me, I will take all the responsibility myself. If you are a quitter—"

"I am not a quitter, but I—" broke in Ray, who was in turn interrupted by Mokava.

"You may have it—I no want it. It is no good to me. Go take it—do as you please with it!"

"That's all right," replied Ray, winking cautiously at the squaw man, indicating that his friend was off his mental balance. "We will arrange it all as soon as my friend gets well. We would not think of betraying such an opportune hospitality as befell us here."

"You mistake me, young man," replied Mooring. "You think I am laboring under mental weakness from my weakened body. My mind was never stronger or more normal."

"I know, but let it rest for a few days," soothed Ray.

"Let it rest!" retorted Mooring. "I will do nothing of the kind. Do you think I am a weakling, a baby, a—"

"My friends quarrel enough," interrupted Mokava.

"That no good. Go take it all. I care not for mines. They not much good—not worth much as friend. You take 'em. I give what I have to you!"

"With those specimens I could organize a company and raise thousands of dollars," argued Mooring more patiently, after Mokava had left them alone. "I might as well declare myself now. I am out here, boy, for the dough. I did not come into this desolate region for my health. I am making this my last throw in mining. Did I not chase to Cripple Creek, to Klondike and to Nome without saving a stake? It was all because I had too much conscience—too much of your stock and trade! I have now laid that impediment aside. I tell you, it won't work in this game!"

"The specimens are not ours; the ground is not ours," replied Ray. "And we do not know but that the theory of our host is right—it may be merely a pockety formation. Though I do believe he is mistaken, that there is mineral in place on what he calls Burro Hill; and that by careful prospecting and conscientious development working mines may be established."

"I don't care anything about technical terms nor theories," explained Mooring. "Neither do I care anything about prior rights that can be pushed aside. You have the specimens; there must be others. We can make the showing back in camp that will start the excitement. I see a fortune ahead without a single obstacle in the way, except your foolish sentiment. I shall brush that aside, if necessary, and go it alone. You may join me if you wish."

Mooring was now exhausted and turned on his pillow and waived Robert Ray aside. The latter walked out into the open. He wandered for a time among the cottonwoods, and finally reached a crude seat which he had constructed under a large tree near the spring and sat down. Amosa and Grant had always followed him before, but they had quickly noticed the cloud on his face as he passed them unperceived, and left him alone to meditation.

"And this is life out in the world of strangers," Ray commented to himself. "Even out here where God is almost alone, men ignore the most elementary rights of others. Greed, greed, greed; I have heard and read so much about it. I had come to think much of it fiction, but I am brought face to face with it in its most unscrupulous type. Who would have thought of its power? Betraying friends, those who have ministered in time of need—actually saved life!"

He sat and thought, and thought, and thought. This was the father of that girl! She had never been out of Ray's mind since that tempestuous night. Was she like her father at heart? Was she, too, so ungrateful? No, such a face and such eyes could not have other than a pure soul behind them! Robert Ray had begun to cling to the theory that children do not inherit the bad traits of their parents. He was schooling himself to believe this. His own peculiar heritage justified his hope in this theory.

But the girl! What would she think of men who would deliberately betray a friend—a host—one who had done so much for them as Mokava had done for

her father—snatched him more dead than alive from the burning sands of the desert? What would she think of such a father? What would she say to Ray should he ever have the opportunity to declare his love to her? But probably she would never learn of her father's conduct. She might some time learn that he had gone prospecting with a man by the name of Ray, and that they had disagreed. She would never know why, but of course, she would blame the stranger.

"Her father's way may be the way of the world," commented Ray, mentally, "but I will never take advantage of a man's ignorance of the law, which that same law will not excuse, and, especially, one who has saved my life and that of my companion. If I can't dissuade Mr. John Mooring from his purpose, then we must part company—and, the—the girl—why, you young fool—she doesn't know your name—she has forgotten that you even exist!"

Then the vision of the prostrate form of the ruffian, and the events of the night he met the girl loomed before him more vivid and more harrowing than ever before, but they quickly vanished before the pretty face and confiding eyes that rose in the background.

Ray was aroused from his meditation by the clatter of small feet. Before he had time to look up Amosa and Grant rushed close to him.

"Young pale face—Bob!" exclaimed Grant, excitedly.

"Oh, Mr. Ray!" followed Amosa, catching her

breath spasmodically. "Your friend, sick man—he get up, dress, and—"

"Go 'way!" finished Grant.

Ray rose and hurried toward the rock house, the two children following at his heels.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVIL BREAKS OUT

RAY had reached the door of the rock house and was about to enter when he saw Mooring walking slowly toward Burro Hill. It required but a short time to reach the side of his feeble friend.

"Jack—Mr. Mooring!" exclaimed Ray, taking him by the arm, "this will never do. You are not strong enough to venture out yet—too much exercise at the start will cause a backset. Besides, the day is very warm. If you must get out, wait until the cool of the morning and go about it gradually. We will never get out of this country unless you take care of yourself!"

"Where are those claims?" asked Mooring, pausing.

"Around through that gulch to the east, over there," explained Ray, pointing with his finger toward a gap in the low range of hills. "They are nearly a mile away, and you could never make it to them in this heat, as weak as you are. Return with me to the house and we will go tomorrow morning, while it is cool. I will mount you on a burro."

The fatigue was telling on Mooring. He now realized that he had attempted too much on his first venture from his bed. He leaned on Ray for a short time to rest himself and they started on the return.

The following morning found a unique prospecting party heading for Burro Hill. Ray and Amosa

and Grant led the way on foot, far outstripping Mooring and Mokava, who were mounted on burros. Ray carried a pick and shovel, while Amosa lugged a big prospecting pan. Mokava had two large cans of water strapped across the back of his burro while two canteens balanced each other from the horn of Mooring's saddle.

"If we had brought grub along we might pitch camp here," smiled Ray when the party reached Mokava's first prospect hole.

"We have plenty of water, and that suits' me," smiled Mooring, who was more jubilant than Ray had ever seen him before. The all-night sleep after his exercise in the open air the previous day had refreshed him wonderfully, and the yellow metal which glistened from the specimens brought in by Ray had set his blood to tingling anew.

"Is this where you got the samples?" asked Mooring.

"It is where I got some of them," explained Ray, "but the richer ones came from the hole farther up the gulch."

"They better still, up at head of gulch," volunteered Mokava.

"Why, we've struck a group of rich claims!" exclaimed Mooring, his eyes sparkling.

Mokava showed them the trend of the deposits in the lower claims and led them to a wall where samples were taken from a softer formation. He crushed particles of these in a mortar improvised from rocks and washed the proceeds in the pan. When he had

finished a string of more or less coarse gold encircled the lower side of the vessel.

"Eureka!" shouted Mooring. "We have found gold in two forms—both milling and free milling."

Then Mokava went to the bed of the gulch and shoveled gravel and sand into the pan. He washed this hurriedly and a thread of gold, so fine that it was hardly discernible to the naked eye, lay in a dent at the bottom of the pan.

"And placer, too!" cried Mooring. "Where have the prospectors been that they have never found this place?"

"It off the trail—few come this way," explained Mokava. "Burro Hill low, never see it till close—always see trees first. No look like minin' land, anyway—an' I no think it is. Too little in same place—stringers run out. Small bank of that you call free millin', and placer too fine to save."

"It's good enough for me—for us—isn't it, Bob?" chuckled Mooring.

"It looks promising," replied Ray.

The fascinating work held them until noon. They recovered many specimens from the crevasses of the walls and from the depths of Mokava's prospect holes. They did not quit until Ray's and Mokava's fingers were sore to the quick from contact with the hard formation. And Mooring had panned the loose gravel and sand until he had exhausted all of the water which they had brought along.

They had returned to the house, ate a hearty meal and Mooring and Ray were in the highest spirits. Late

in the afternoon Mooring joined Ray, after a long rest, under the cottonwoods near the spring.

"Did you enjoy your nap?" asked Ray.

"Had a fine sleep," said Mooring. "Never felt better. Say, Bob, have I talked in my sleep since we started on this journey?" asked Mooring after a long pause.

"Occasionally, since we arrived here," smiled Ray.

Mooring looked at him inquiringly and worried.

"But, like most persons who talk in their sleep," hurried Ray, "you gave but little information to your involuntary audience."

Mooring's countenance cleared.

"In your mumbling sentences sometimes I caught the word 'Ruby,' but you did not disclose whether you referred to a person or precious stone. I—"

"I doubtless referred to my daughter," interrupted Mooring, the blood coloring his face slightly. "That is her name and she will prove a jewel to the man who is so fortunate as to get her. She is as much unlike her—but such dreams as I have had. If there is anything in bad dreams that tend to suggest to a man what is in store for him, I will never be hanged—that would be too easy. Tar and feathers and burning at the stake would be a mild ending as suggested by my dreams.

"I have been trying to separate the dreams while I was asleep, or the things that ran through my brain in the delirium, from my thoughts while I was conscious. It is difficult to find the dividing line. I cannot segregate the volumes of terrible stuff that passed

through my brain from the time I lost consciousness in the desert until several days after my revival in the rock house, and the waking and sleeping hours were so much alike."

"Ruby, Ruby!" ran through Robert Ray's mind again and again, and he was about to reveal some of his family history when Mooring broke forth anew.

"Oh, to the devil with dreams and the past! Bob, I have a plan to suggest. It is this. There is enough of that ground for all of us—you, the squaw man and myself. His third would not cut in very heavy, and he has been a darned good fellow."

Ray rose and ran to where Mooring was reclining on the grass and grasped his hand.

"That is what I have been wanting to hear you say, Mr. Mooring—let us three share alike. Mokava may be mistaken about the depth of the formation—I hope he is. Nature is peculiar with her deposits of wealth. She hides them in out of the way places; drops samples here and there, as if to throw men off her trail; there is no fixed rule for searching for her wealth. There may be large quantities of ore, of the richest kind, in the bosom of Burro Hill; the highly mineralized float found nearly everywhere over there certainly indicates that we are in close proximity to mineral in place."

"I don't want anything better, unless it is a place where we can scoop up the gold," replied Mooring. "Let us get out early tomorrow morning and monument the ground and put up the notices."

"I will attend to that," volunteered Ray. "You

are not able to work yet, and Mokava is doing enough in graciously sharing the property with us. I will step off the ground and build the monuments in a short time. I have only been waiting for this turn of your mind. I knew you would never consent in the end to leave Mokava out. Let us prepare and sign the location notices this afternoon."

The blood again rose to the cheeks of Mooring at this reference to his honesty as the two men rose and walked to the house. They found paper, pen and ink among their belongings, and called Mokava for a conference.

"Do as you please," directed the settler when Ray had explained the plan. "I no have much belief in mines, but maybe I wrong. It would be good though—for Nevada, Amosa and Grant!"

Mokava refused to stand idly by and assisted Ray in the work. And Amosa and Grant carried stones too heavy for their strength and added them to the monuments that the two men built. Mooring went along on a burro and placed the notices on the right places. His strength was returning almost as rapidly as it had left him.

At the end of two days they had placed the requirements of the law on all of the ground they desired, and the visitors were eager to start on their return journey. Mooring was anxious to begin the operations which he had planned, and Robert Ray wished to test the samples which he had taken from various points of the claims. They arranged to leave early on the following morning.

Mooring was up until late in the night. He spent a good portion of the time writing. Ray slept so soundly that he knew nothing of his friend's late hours. Mokava and Tehana were also up late. They were preparing food for the prospectors to take with them.

"Our friends up late, too, last night—did we bother 'em so they no sleep?" asked Mokava next morning.

"No, I went to sleep as soon as I went to bed and slept like a log all night," replied Ray. "Did you not sleep well, Mr. Mooring?"

"Yes—after I turned in," explained Mooring, looking out toward the spring.

"Did you not retire early?" asked Ray, anxiously.

"No," answered Mooring.

"Not feeling well?" inquired Ray, staring into his companion's face.

"Never felt better in my life—was at work," explained Mooring.

"Glad it was just work—but you should have delayed this until we get back to camp," the cloud passing from his face. "You frightened me. I feared a relapse. You will need all your strength. We have a hard journey before us, as you know."

"With what we have found I could endure anything indefinitely, without food, drink or sleep," boasted Mooring.

"Good!" cheered Ray. "But I trust our troubles are about over. We know the course now, and by traveling early in the morning and late in the night, and resting in the hotter portion of the day, we ought to make it through without mishap."

Instead of striking out across the desert as Ray expected, Mooring led his burro to the spring. Ray followed, thinking his companion desired one more draught of the cool water direct from the fountain-head before leaving. But instead, Mooring nailed a large piece of paper covered with writing on a stake made from a cottonwood sapling. He then drove the stake deep into the ground by the side of the spring.

"What do you mean?" asked Ray, with astonishment.

"I am securing this water right," smiled Mooring.

"It belongs to Mokava," replied Ray, his face whitening.

"It belongs to me now!" laughed Mooring, outright.

"Would you still try to rob the man who has done so much for us; who has divided what appears to be valuable mining property with us equally, and without demanding price?" inquired Ray with disgust.

"I would do anything," replied Mooring in a malicious tone. "The devil that is in a man will crop out after the man has been in the world as long as I have and made a failure at everything that he has undertaken. Why, that spring is worth more than a gold mine! When we have started the rush to this place I will set my price on that water. I will sell it by the bucketful, and dole out small rights for big checks. Young man, that is my rakeoff for the extra suffering I have endured on this trip!"

"That's going too far; I'm through," said Ray, biting his lips. "I'll have to quit you when we reach

our destination. Humanity demands that we travel together until then; that's all!"

"Will you abandon your interest in the claims?" asked Mooring, eagerly.

"No; we got them fairly," said Ray.

They reached a rise in the desert. The two men stopped their burros on the summit and looked back for a farewell glance at the green trees and the rich meadow which nestled out there in the sea of sands. They saw Tehana running from the spring to the house. She had seen the performance of the elder prospector and had gone to investigate. Shortly after the Indian woman entered the rock house Mokava came out and walked slowly to the spring. He stood for a moment and looked at the sign on the stake. Then he kicked down the timber, tore off the writing, crumpled it in his hands and threw it to the ground.

"He's too late, now," smiled the elder man as they proceeded on their journey. "I will record a copy of the notice and hold that water against the world!"

"Isn't possession worth something?" snarled Ray.

"Not for an Indian against a white man," smiled Mooring with a triumphant air.

"He is a white man," retorted Ray.

"He will have a hard time proving it," scorned Mooring. "He has an Indian name, an Indian wife, Indian children and will have to stand for an Indian!"

CHAPTER VI

THE RUSH

IT WAS early dawn a week after the departure of Ray and Mooring. Amosa and Grant had risen early as was their custom since Robert Ray had entered their lives, and were enjoying the cool morning breeze while their parents slept. A speck rose upon the desert in the distance. It moved up and down in such a manner that it attracted the attention of the children. It was coming toward them. It grew in size as it approached and, to them, its form became more mysterious.

"What is that thing?" finally asked the boy.

The girl was silent. She thought she knew, but could not remember what name to call it. It rose above the horizon and seemed to ride with the drifting sands like a boat on the swell of the ocean. It would almost disappear at times and then rise into view above the general level of the desert again.

"What is it?" again inquired the boy, with childish impatience.

"It is—it is the thing that Nevada told us about which runs without a horse to draw it," stammered Amosa in deep thought.

"A train?" suggested Grant.

"No, trains run on tracks; that thing comes across the desert like a coyote—oh, I know!" her face lighting up. "It's a choo-choo wagon. Don't you remem-

ber what Nevada called the new kind of a thing that runs without a horse or anything to pull it?"

Five men were seated in the automobile which duly arrived. They made direct for the spring, and John Mooring was first to alight from the machine. He posted new notices, in which he claimed the water rights, and began to establish a permanent camp. While some of the men were preparing breakfast, others busied themselves with the surveying instruments, and everything was bustle and hurry.

Amosa and Grant ran into the adobe where they found Mokava already aware of the arrival of the interlopers. He had just rescued a small rifle from Tehana's hands, and was taking the cartridges from the magazine.

"Peace with you, Tehana," he cautioned in the language which she understood. "You would bring ruin upon us. The white men will be coming as numerous as the jack rabbits when the grass is tender upon the meadow. We cannot stop them. But the young prospector is not there. He is our friend. He will return. He will help us. He will not let them take all of our water from us. He would not let the old coyote take even the worthless rocks on Burro Hill."

"I have no faith in the pale faces—they are not like you, Mokava. You just like Indian in your ways," replied Tehana. "I would kill the old coyote. He brought the others here. It is he who has taken our water, and that, too, after you brought him from the desert and put the life back in him. That is the way

he pays you; that is the pale face way. They do not do as the Great Spirit would have us do."

"But have I not always counseled you right?" asked Mokava. "It will all be well in the end. Other white men will come, and with them our young friend. He will not desert us. Be patient until then."

Mokava walked slowly out to where the men were engaged in work and greeted them cordially. Mooring spoke sulkily and displayed firearms.

"Squaw man," he began, "we might as well have an understanding at once. I have taken this ground and the spring, under the law. But I am going to do the right thing by you. I will not molest your buildings nor your yard. But on the site of the meadow I shall establish the business portion of the new town, which we are going to build. And, as another mark of generosity, I shall give you a perpetual right to obtain drinking water from the spring. So long as you accept these terms, we shall get along all right. If you refuse, then I shall exercise my rights against you as I shall against others!"

"Where the young man—your friend?" asked Mokava.

"He is not my friend—he and I quit!" smiled Mooring.

"This is my partner, now," continued Mooring, after watching Mokava's bewildered expression for a time, pointing to a big, burly fellow, who wore a large revolver buckled about his waist.

The big man smiled his approval of what Mooring had said, but the surveyor and his assistant indi-

cated that they were not parties to the transaction; that they were merely employed to do the work of laying out the new town. The chauffeur was busy cleaning the sand from the machinery of his automobile.

"You men look enough alike to be brothers," suggested the surveyor, glancing back and forth between Mooring and Mokava. "You ought to be able to settle your differences accordingly."

"I no understand, very well," replied the settler. "I know not what you call right. I found this place many years ago when no one care for it. I make it my home. No one trouble me before. I always help white man and red man when they come this way. It my home, share it with all alike. I thought it mine. No know what you call right. But want to do right. I no want to do wrong, and no want wrong done me. It been mine so long. Now you say it yours. Don't understand?"

"Law is law, Squaw Man, and you will have to accept our terms," replied the big fellow, coming forward as if he would drive Mokava away.

"It may be white man's law, but it no seem right!" replied Mokava, humbly, and returned to his house.

The work of surveying continued for several days. A townsite was laid out with regulation streets and alleys, leaving the settler's little home plot to itself. Mokava had not been molested further, and had gone on using water from the spring. He showed his old-time hospitality and furnished the intruders with such supplies as he could spare when they ran short. They

assured him that he would be repaid when their freight wagons arrived, but Mokava informed them that he did not expect the return of the articles, as he considered it his duty as a neighbor.

Before the week was ended the place was overrun with strangers. Men arrived in automobiles, wagons, on burros and on foot. Camps were started all around the settler, and a saloon was opened in a tent near the spring, for the privilege of which the proprietor paid Mooring and his partner a snug sum of money. Wagons loaded with supplies and building material began to arrive almost hourly, night and day. Every morning found new saloons, restaurants and lodging houses open for business in tents, and on lots which Mooring and his partner had sold.

A rival town was started adjoining the survey made by the first arrivals, but lack of water made it a poor competitor. Mooring and his partner sold water by the bucketful to the settlers of the new town, but gave drinking water free to those who purchased lots from them.

"You see, we are treating you right," explained Mooring to Mokava one day. "I give you water, even for your stock. Others have to pay!"

Mokava did not respond. He could not see the justice in the matter, but had resigned to the white man's way—at least, until Robert Ray should return. Ray had shown such a spirit of honesty when Mooring tried to take the squaw man's claims that Mokava hoped to see him intercede again.

But Robert Ray was oblivious of the real situation

at the new camp. He knew that a rush was on, but did not suspect its magnitude. He and Mooring had traveled to Goldfield more like strangers than companions. The breach over the treatment of Mokava had widened. Upon their arrival in the camp, from which they had started out, Mooring left the work of having assays made of their samples, and the recording of notices of the filings on their claims to Ray. Mooring looked to the plans which he had formed on his way out. They met but once after their arrival. It was when Ray turned over copies of the certificates of the assays made of the Burro Hill samples. Large as they were, Ray saw from the camp newspapers that they had been magnified several times.

Next Ray noticed that the newspapers were devoting most of their space to the new discovery. He had never known such exaggeration, even in the wildest days in Colorado. They told of a "Modern King Solomon," in the guise of a "Hermit Squaw Man" and his "mountain of solid gold, surrounded by gurgling springs of crystal water and valleys of green; an oasis—a heaven, free, beckoning for everybody to come!"

Ray could hear nothing else on the streets. They would not listen to him. The stage of listening to men had passed. They went to the cold black type of the newspapers to get facts.

Mooring had disappeared. Outfits were leaving, night and day. Ray took his time. He had to record the filings on the Burro Hill claims, taken up by him and Mooring and Mokava, both in the office of the county clerk and with the register of the mining dis-

trict. He was besieged by men who wanted to buy an interest in his claims. They would not listen to his conservative statements about the new field, and he would not sell. He was absorbing the excitement. Perhaps he was the part owner of a new Monte Cristo!

But he went about his work of getting ready to return to the new discovery without haste. He secured credit easily and purchased such supplies as he thought he would need, and fell in with a party that now followed a beaten highway back over the trail which Mooring and Ray had made in coming in.

When Ray arrived at the new camp he could hardly believe that it was the same place that he and Mooring had left a few days before. Two towns were under headway, and the lonely abode of the settler of a few days before was now in the midst of the most bustling little city Ray had ever beheld. Promoters and brokers were establishing themselves, and every available inch of ground, even out into the desert, was being filed upon and staked under the mining laws. Prospect holes were being sunk near every outcropping of rock. Assayers were running their little furnaces day and night, and were getting results. With all of his conservative nature, Robert Ray was forced to believe that he had made a great discovery in the desert.

Mooring had guessed right when he predicted that the spring was worth more than a gold mine. Without water the properties could not be developed. Without water a town could not be built. Everybody and everything depended upon the spring which Ray found in the possession of Mooring and his partner. Through

greed they were making it more difficult to others every day. They had sunk a reservoir to catch the overflow, and even fenced the small stream that ran off from this, so as to compel everybody to buy every drop of water from them. Water that flowed beyond the fence was quickly absorbed by the desert sands.

Experts stated that the supply, if properly developed, would be adequate for all demands, but the high prices charged by the jumpers had made it almost prohibitive for other than drinking purposes. Mokava said there was not another source within a hundred miles. He had traveled in the desert in all directions, and had chosen the place because of its isolation.

The water question had reached the exploding point. It was conceded that Mooring and his partner had a technical right under the law, but many argued that there was always a power that was superior to what they called a poor law; that there were occasions when the unwritten should override the written law; that the occasion had now risen, and that the will of the majority should abrogate the unjust claims made to the only source of supply of water in that entire region. They recalled the fact of the settler's thirty years of occupancy; the manner in which Mooring had first filed on the supply; the necessity for water on the part of the public gathered out there in a little world of its own; the high prices charged by the men in possession. The patent could be resisted in the courts, it was true, but that would mean a long delay.

They turned to Robert Ray. They needed a leader. They had been waiting for Ray. He had the cause

of the settler more at heart than any other, and it was through Mokava's claims that they hoped to secure a better adjustment.

"Let us drive the jumpers from the ground without further delay!" they said.

"It will cost bloodshed. We may as well prepare for that!" suggested a member of the committee who had called on Ray.

"I do not believe Mr. Mooring will seriously resist with force," replied Ray.

"But his partner will—he is a desperado—he would rather have trouble than not, and they have employed some gunmen!"

"Who is this fellow? Where did Mr. Mooring get him?" asked Ray, who had arrived the night before, and had met but few of the tumultuous throng that had preceded him.

"Brush—Andy Brush, and a more consummate looking scoundrel never came to a new mining camp!" was the reply.

"I do not think we should fear this man—any man who is in the wrong," replied Ray. "That does not worry me," he continued after a long pause. He was thinking of Mooring's daughter. Should he lead these men against the father, it mattered not how just the cause, the daughter would be against him. Then he had other scruples. "My sympathies are with your cause, gentlemen. I will aid you in any kind of a legitimate fight against these men, but you doubtless realize my awkward position in the matter. Mr. Mooring and I, as you know, came prospecting to-

gether. Finding this camp was due to our joint effort—or accident. You know the law of prospecting—a prospector should never turn against his pal!”

“He turned against you—threw you down!” interjected one of the men.

“That wouldn’t justify me in retaliating,” replied Ray, neither admitting or denying the charge against Mooring.

“But you are the man to lead us,” urged one of the men. “Mokava has waited for you. He depends upon you. We have all waited for you. The matter has been delayed too long already. Your leadership would be disinterested. We all feel that way about it. You are the friend of Mokava. You are in a measure responsible for his protection. The man with whom you came to his place has abused your hospitality. The camp believes you are on the square.”

“You do not understand what it might mean to me—no one will ever know,” replied Ray, as he thought of the girl with the big brown eyes again. “Go to Mr. Mooring. Go once more! Reason with him. Surely some kind of argument ought to reach the man’s sense of justice!”

The committee went immediately to the spring. They found Mooring talking with prospective customers while his partner stood at the entrance of the enclosure. He was heavily armed, as were others who were stationed about the place, and who looked doggedly at every one who approached.

“He is an Indian—a squaw man, at best,” replied Mooring to the men who urged Mokava’s claims.

"We have acquired our rights under the laws. Would you ignore the law through sympathy for a half-savage out here who happened to pitch his tepee near a spring in the desert? Would you retard immigration and the upbuilding of the country through mere sentiment? No, we will not surrender our rights to have them grabbed by others! Tell Traitor Ray to come on—that we will defend our possessions to the last ditch!"

The big fellow smiled approval of what Mooring had said, and glanced about at his armed companions with a knowing wink.

Robert Ray was awaiting the result of the conference with deep concern. But no one detected his agitation. He was the old master of himself. The hour had arrived when he must take an important step. He could have gone on and pursued his course independently of Mooring, and without antagonizing him, could have faced the daughter, should he ever meet her again, without feeling hampered by the estrangement from her father. But should he be forced to lead a fight against the father, the daughter would never learn the facts, except from prejudiced lips.

And the ruffian might have died! How had the girl explained it all? She and her mother would ultimately come to the new camp. Ray would come face to face with her again some day! But as the leader of a faction against her father, what chance would he have to talk with her and learn all? Would she join her father in their controversy, and even brand him as a murderer, if it became a valuable asset in the fight

for her father? He had heard it said that no one can account for what a woman may do!

It was while Ray was meditating along these lines when the committee returned from the conference with Mooring. They informed him briefly of what had taken place, emphasizing Mooring's personal defiance to Ray.

"I'm a traitor, am I?" repeated Ray with a smile. It was a dangerous smile. The old steel in his eyes grew lighter. The fire began to burn. It was too late to turn back.

"Then, gentlemen, I am at your service in whatever capacity you name!" said Ray, in ominous calmness.

"There he goes now—it is Brush calling the remainder of his guards to duty," said one of the men excitedly, looking across the street.

Ray glanced in the direction indicated. His eyes flashed like those of a tiger who had suddenly discovered its most hated enemy. His muscles sprung, as if voluntarily, to high tension. His body bent forward for a second as if he would go alone to recover the spring. Then a wicked smile passed over his countenance, and he said calmly:

"Gentlemen, let us not delay—let us go and take the water and deliver it up to the true owner for his own disposal!"

CHAPTER VII

THE WIDENING OF THE GULF

EVERY man in camp hurriedly joined the one side or the other. The majority, however, was against Mooring and Brush. But the latter had secured a small following among their customers, and, added to these were their hired gunmen and Mexicans, who had drifted in with the rush. These quickly assembled at the spring.

Robert Ray took the lead of the attacking party. But he adopted a most unique plan. The discovery of his old adversary of the night's adventure in San Francisco at the head of the fighters for Mooring, had removed a great load from his mind. The horror of possible murder had never left his mind. Now he was determined to avoid bloodshed, if it could be done.

His followers were ready to fight and fight desperately, and unto death. They were gathering from every direction and were armed with every conceivable kind of weapon. From the latest improved rifle and revolver they brought with them the crudest weapons, some carrying awkward looking sticks and rocks. Many came barehanded, but with a look of determination that boded greater danger than the most up-to-date weapons.

Those men out there from everywhere, far from courts and officers, each felt a responsibility that was personal—more binding than those who depend upon

the minions of the law to enforce justice. They went about the matter as if each man was personally called upon to execute a decree that would meet with the approval of his own conscience. They had weighed every phase of the case. The fact of the settler's long possession, his kindness to those who had come that way—especially, his act of rescuing Mooring from the desert and nursing him back to life again under his own roof; Mooring's subsequent ingratitude; Mokava's generosity with his claims on Burro Hill, which were the richest in the camp—all had been discussed by the men who were now judge, jury and sheriff. The technicalities of the law were brushed aside and the real facts had been weighed in the real scales of equity and justice. The decision was unanimous, and final.

Robert Ray looked at them with a smile playing upon his face. His eyes were as penetrating as the blue steel from which they took their color. He told them to lay aside their weapons. They looked at him with surprise. Again he smiled and asked them to lay aside the weapons.

"We don't need them to handle those fellows—I will take care of the leader, barehanded, and you men will surely be able to manage that handful of greasers!" said Ray. He then directed the men to form in a line, four deep, placing himself at the head of where he wished the column formed.

His coolness worked like magic. The men quickly laid aside the weapons and began to fall in line. There was some confusion at first, as each man wanted to get in front next to Ray.

But after a short delay Robert Ray led the long column of unarmed but determined men right up to the fence which surrounded the spring. The guards stood ready to fire, but the audacity of the unarmed men in front of them weakened their purpose. They turned to Brush for instructions. Mooring was nowhere in sight. Ray was now within handtouch of Brush. He pierced the eyes of Brush with his look of steel. Every muscle of the young man was now taut and ready for action. Brush looked at him for a second with a faint expression of recognition. Then a doubt as quickly passed over his face. Then Ray knew from the glance that followed that Brush had not recognized him. He was disappointed at first. The old fight in him called for another round with the big ruffian, but he quickly realized that it was not a matter now between him and the head of the guard, but a question of proprietorship of the water.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Brush, still holding his rifle ready for action.

"We have come to take possession of the spring," replied Ray, calmly. "We prefer to do it peaceably, but we've come to take it!"

Brush was silent for a moment. The wall of unarmed men which now stood before him looked like a mountain of impenetrable armor before him. He knew that it was indestructible; that he might fire his leaden missiles against it, and through it, but it would not affect the cause behind it.

While he was standing thus transfixed, Mooring came hurriedly from some nearby cover. He looked

at Brush and then at the determined men who stood behind Ray.

"Shall we shoot?" asked Brush, sheepishly.

"No, no, no!" replied Mooring. "Let us arbitrate!"

"There is nothing to arbitrate," said Ray. "We have already decided the matter. Our decision is that everything within an area of one hundred and sixty acres belongs to Mokava. This includes water and all other rights. Any one occupying a foot within that territory, unless he is able to show a permit from Mokava, is a trespasser. Make your terms with the settler or begin to vacate. This is our decree. It is final!"

"We will divide it with him. We have been offered one hundred thousand dollars for the water rights alone. Let us split it with the squaw man," suggested Mooring. "If we had not come it would never have been worth anything to him!"

"Our coming did not affect his rights," smiled Ray. "It belongs to him—it matters not how much it is worth, or why it is worth it. You are in the same position as others. The man or men who make terms with Mokava will get it!"

"I give it to all you, just as I have it," interjected Mokava, who had been a bewildered spectator. "The Great Spirit—God, He give it to all alike. It belongs to everybody. Let everybody help self to water!"

"You do not understand, Mokava," explained Ray. "You come first. You have it by right of possession. It is yours according to custom—under the law. No one shall take it from you without compensation. It

is valuable. This is a community now. It will be much larger. The water must be developed and husbanded for the many. Some one may do it and make money by it. Some one will do it. But this some one must first pay you for the right. Everybody will get an even chance in this way. Whoever pays the most shall have the right. But you must first be paid!"

"Appoint a committee to confer with us," suggested Brush, who had been a silent listener, but who, at the same time, had held his rifle ready for instant action.

"You may confer with us—we are a committee of the whole," replied Ray, recalling that he had heard some such an expression in a school affair once.

"But you are making this a one-sided affair!" interjected Mooring.

"You have been trying to make it one," smiled Ray.

Mooring and Brush held a short consultation. Then Mooring suggested that he and Brush should have the first right to purchase.

"The only first rights are those of Mokava," said Ray. "Everybody shall have an equal right to purchase these."

"Then let us think over it until tomorrow?" requested Mooring. "Let us then meet together and come to terms."

"There is no objection to meeting tomorrow, provided that you now surrender this spring to the public. Tell your armed friends there to disband," said Ray.

"This is pretty tough!" replied Mooring.

"It is your only alternative—and we have no fur-

ther time to parley," said Ray, noting that the men behind him were growing impatient.

Mooring and Brush again talked together in a low tone. Brush was obstinate, but Mooring was a diplomat. He knew that it was useless to resist further. His only hope lay in yet getting some advantage in final adjustment. They spoke to their men. They all walked away sullenly. They knew now that they would henceforth be unpopular in the camp. They had had to yield.

"In the meantime," said Ray, "the water rights shall be free to all alike, just as they were when you and I first came, Mr. Mooring."

"As you will it, Mr. Dictator!" replied Mooring, with an expression of sarcasm.

Ray smiled, as the men disbanded and gathered around the spring and began to quench their thirst from the crystal water.

Mooring's big partner gave Ray a long, penetrating look as he walked away with his rifle under his arm. Ray was too busy receiving the congratulations of his companions about the spring to notice the act of the big fellow.

The meeting the following day was a formal matter. Men work fast in a new mining camp. The details had all been arranged the previous night. A company had been formed and Mokava's interest was appraised and purchased. He was given cash and securities to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars for his water rights. A perpetual right was

reserved to the town of free water for fire and other public uses.

The camp hurried on in its mad growth. The building of new towns in the desert over night was a common occurrence in Nevada in the early portion of 1900. Coyotes and jack rabbits were frightened from their dens and burrows by the rush of gold-seekers when the yellow metal was discovered in these wastes.

It was a problem at first how to rescue the wealth from these forbidding stretches of rolling hills and moving sands. But men had crossed the plains in 1849 and washed it from the gravel and sands of uninhabited California. They had even fought their way through hostile Indian bands to reach the place. Then they climbed the snow peaks above the clouds and tapped the rich deposits of Leadville. Cripple Creek next yielded her secret vaults from their supposed impregnable heights. Then came the Klondike, even in the shadow of the Arctic pole. Through mountains of snow, over glaciers and peaks, down into the very heart of eternal winter, men burrowed their way, and again rescued yellow gold from its icy retreat.

But when it was discovered out in the desert sands, on the very borders of Death Valley, the accursed spot of earth, the bravest shook their heads and said that nature had at last found a hiding place safe from the avaricious hand of man. She had guarded it this time with long stretches of alkali plains, over which roamed nothing but death; where blew heat-laden winds whose scorching breath seared and killed everything they touched; where rain was turned into pois-

onous vapor the instant it struck the earth, and where men's flesh dried and baked even while they moved about; where the brain was addled by the burning sun; where the strongest succumbed to the consuming heat of nature's great furnace.

But men did not fail. They swept down into the desert with greater fury than that of the elements. Some fell, it is true, but others passed on. A moment to rake the scorching sands over the parching body of a fallen comrade, and on and on, into the stifling furnace men rushed, as if it were merely a pleasure trip.

First the man with his pick and shovel and his hardy burro wormed his way through the hot blasts and blinding dust across the seething sands into the defiles of the mountains ribbed with white-heated rocks. Though men and animals perished at every step, others staggered on. A survivor, more lucky than the others, occasionally found protruding from the baking walls ledges of quartz sprinkled with gold. He had only to break off a piece with his prospecting pick and hurry back with it over the death-route to civilization again. When the assayer's test told the story a new star had risen, and the discoverer found himself rich beyond all his dreams.

The man in the automobile followed his trail. A town was plotted. Men on burros, on foot, in all manner of vehicles followed. The ground thereabouts was all staked. The nearest water was posted and the laying of pipes begun. Mining companies, water companies, light companies—every kind of company

and trade and calling organized and opened business. The overflow of the business and professional world ran like a mill race to fill this new vacuum of opportunity. Where yesterday was a barren desert spot, thirty days hence was a rag city with postoffice, telephone, stage-line, express company, with railroads, water plants and lighting equipment on the way. These were not isolated cases, and one of the most typical was the one founded by the accidental discovery of the home of Mokava by Robert Ray.

With the proceeds of the sale of his spring Mokava considered himself rich beyond the dreams of avarice. He had never before had as much as one hundred dollars. He was puzzled about what to do with his money. But the sale of his spring was but the beginning of his fortune. The forced act of justice toward him assured justice to him all around. Mooring and Brush now had unlimited capital behind them. They offered another hundred thousand dollars for his homestead rights, with the reservation that he should retain his home plot and improvements. This he quickly accepted.

Then another company was organized which took over the Burro Hill group of mining claims located by Mooring, Ray and Mokava. Mokava was now money-mad and took cash for his interest, which made him the richest man in camp. Robert Ray and John Mooring accepted stock in the new company for their interest.

Then came the naming of the town. Mooring and Brush had secured a name from the government for

the postoffice, but their attempt to steal the home and spring of Mokava had so turned the people against them that they would not consent to the new name. Word had just reached the place that the name of Annette had been selected. Then it was learned that this was also the name of Mooring's wife. Another meeting was called and the naming of the town created an excitement similar to that caused by the fight over the settler's rights to the spring.

Mooring and Brush insisted on the name of Annette because the government had adopted it. They urged, with effect, that different names for the post-office and town would prove confusing to the outside world.

"Why not name it for the man who blazed the way?" asked Robert Ray, following his question with a strong eulogy of Mokava. He had accepted the gauntlet thrown down by John Mooring when the latter branded him as a traitor, and he was determined that Mooring should now feel his power. His advocacy of the name of the settler for the new town had struck a keynote and upon a final vote the name of Mokava was adopted.

Thus showered with wealth and honor the settler was dazed. It was a dream more than realized. He trod the air like a spoiled boy who had come into his indiscreet father's fortune without reservation. His happiness knew no bounds. But not so with Tehana. When she affixed her mark to the deed which conveyed their possessions she did it with silent lips and a sad heart.

"Let us fly away to our old home near the Land

of Fire!" she said in her native tongue when she and Mokava were alone. "I see great trouble coming. No more shall we have our cool water and green grass. I hear my native tongue no more. Our children are wandering farther away every day. They forget their mother already. Nevada has strayed into another world, and Grant and Amosa are following her as fast as the jack rabbit runs. Let us leave. These pale faces make my heart sick."

"No, no. It shall not be so," replied Mokava in the speech of his wife. "I will always be with you. It is for our children. We will make a great man of Grant. He will be greater than any chief who ever led your tribe. And Nevada and Amosa! They shall be educated in the white tongue. They shall play the white man's music and sing the white man's songs. They will cause our hearts much joy!"

As the days passed Tehana did not change her mind. The settler was too busy to spend any more time than his meals with his family. Amosa and Grant were bewildered with the attention bestowed on them. Tehana, only, was morose and brooded over that which gave the others so much joy.

"Let us go," she pleaded time and again with her husband in her soft jerky tongue. "I prefer the lonely home in the desert and the low songs of the wind to the music which comes from the dance halls. I like the stars, which shine so softly, better than the lights which glare from the poles in the streets. I would rather rest within the sound of the desert lion's cry

and the call of the coyote than lie awake at night in this terrible den of the pale faces."

"Be patient, all will come right after a while," soothed the settler. The only thing soothing, however, was that he spoke in her native tongue.

Burro Hill stock climbed by the day and Robert Ray's fortune increased accordingly. But John Mooring's wealth poured in from a dozen sources. He was behind or heavily interested in every live enterprise, and there were but few that were not bringing in large profits. He and Robert Ray had met but once when there were not others present since Ray's repeated victories for the settler. It was on the street late at night. Ray was on his way to his room and Mooring was heading for his hotel. Mooring was first to speak.

"Well, young man, you seem to be running the town about your own way. How does it feel to be the Big Mitt?"

"You give me too much credit, Mr. Mooring," replied Ray, modestly. "The people of the town are running it, and I happen to feel that they are running it about right."

"If it hadn't been for you, Brush and I would have been better off by a half million dollars," continued Mooring, vindictively.

"I believe you are again mistaken, Mr. Mooring," replied Ray. "I fear that if it hadn't been for me and some of my conservative friends, even a million dollars wouldn't be worth much to either you or Brush at this time."

"What do you mean?" asked Mooring, musingly.

"Why, those hot-headed people would have mobbed—killed you!"

"Oh, you are posing as a life saver, now, are you?" returned Mooring, sarcastically.

"No, but you ought to know that if we hadn't chosen to make the call on you without arms that there would have been shooting, and that you and Brush would have been the first targets from our side," explained Ray.

"Tut, tut, Mr. Captain! That is as childish as some of your other ideas," replied Mooring, haughtily. "Forget it, along with your little victories over me. It means only your ultimate ruin. I will have to take the conceit out of you, I see that. Now, just take a little stock as you go along; the war is just beginning between you and I—I'm going to run you out of this camp a tramp! Either you or I will walk out, and I expect to ride out on a palace car! Do you understand?"

"I hope you will not have to be carried out, as you were brought in—I beg your pardon, Mr. Mooring, that was too coarse," replied Ray, apologetically.

"Don't get off any sarcasm at my expense, young man!" growled Mooring. "You understood me—do you accept my challenge?"

"Do you mean that one or the other of us will have to leave camp?" inquired Ray, his eyes beginning to flash.

"That is," modified Mooring, "I do not mean that either should undertake, physically to run the other

out of camp, but that he will do it through influence—personal and financial.”

“Oh, well, as I have not much of either, I suppose you will win with hands down,” replied Ray. “It is not my purpose intentionally to hurt any one, either physically or financially, but if my regular course, which will be pursued along the same lines in future as in the past, should run anybody out of town they will have to go.”

“You mean you will keep up the same old fight?” inquired Mooring.

“I shall pursue my own course.”

“Then I will use my own weapons—and remember, you go out of camp on foot!” said Mooring, contemptuously, as he walked away.

CHAPTER VIII

VISIONS OF MOKAVA

THE town of Mokava continued to grow like magic. The wealth of its prospects was advertised near and far. Two newspapers and scores of weekly stock letters, issued by brokers, repeated the wonderful growth of Mokava and the wealth of its mines. Other camps and towns sprung up, and rival newspapers told of their wonderful possibilities, but the town of Mokava continued to lead. It had the water, and water was the drawing card in the desert.

A railroad was now on the way and its tracks were being laid night and day. Every morning a new terminus was established and great walls of freight of every description were piled out in the desert for the freight teams which lined the way to Mokava. Mooring and Brush had laid out the town on a broad scale. Wide streets and alleys had been graded, where grading was necessary, and a beautiful plot stretched out on the former meadow of the settler. Incandescent bulbs lighted every corner throughout the night from a plant which had been rushed in on freight wagons from the latest terminus of the railroad. Houses of every description, built of corrugated iron, plank, old boxes, tin, bottles, cloth—everything that would afford shelter, stood side by side in ludicrous comparison.

The fact that title was furnished from Mooring & Brush upon no other basis than a quit-claim deed from

the settler did not retard the sales which were made at a large sum by the front foot. In addition to the newspapers, hotels, saloons, gambling dives, dance halls, and an imposing red-light district, a large number of mercantile establishments had been opened. Mooring & Brush had also started a bank. The town of Mokava was mad with excitement. It was too isolated yet to have its resources verified, and whether its foundation was true or false mattered not with its present growth. What cared the men who were drunk on money? Work on claims ceased, but the printing presses kept time with the gambling devices. Both ran night and day. The one printed stock certificates with green-colored backs and golden fronts, which brought in postoffice money orders, bank drafts and checks from the outside world; the other relieved the indiscreet brokers of these about as fast as they came in.

While the town Mokava was blustering on in its mad growth, the man Mokava was beyond restraint. How could he ever spend all of the money which he had received for all of his holdings? His small personal demands did not even appear to disturb his bank account. He had refused to speculate, but Mooring had pretended friendship and agreed with Mokava that the hatchet was forever buried between them and Mokava had placed his money in the latter's bank.

Robert Ray would not have approved of this move on the part of the settler, but he had not been consulted, anyway. Besides, it was the only bank in town and the safest place for Mokava's money for the pres-

ent. Then Mooring & Brush were doing a wonderful business and they were perfectly solvent. Another bank was being organized and Ray would keep Mokava's interest in mind.

But Mokava was not long in finding a way to spend money. Public enterprises were needed. Lawlessness demanded a town hall and a jail. Christian workers reached the place and began the work of helping the unfortunate and building places of worship. Charity demanded its toll from newly acquired wealth. Mokava responded liberally. Mooring's selfish warning for Mokava to keep his money in the bank was no more effective than the friendly advice of Robert Ray to conserve his funds.

"I am doing it for Nevada," he would whisper to Ray.

This was after he had completed a home for himself on the old town plot at an expense that would have appeared extravagant to the most injudicious spendthrifts. He had furnished it, too, without regard to cost, and had ordered a piano of the finest make. The pianist at a dance hall had chosen the instrument for him and received a commission both ways.

"It is all for Nevada," he would say.

But Mokava was not neglectful of his Indian wife. He bought for her apparel which she would not wear, and which she cast aside. Even in the building of the fine home and its equipment, the old improvements were not disturbed. The rock house, the adobe and the tepee back in the rear occupied their places with

their furnishings unchanged. They were just as Ray and Mooring had found them on their first arrival.

The new home was completed and furnished to the last drapery when the piano arrived. The dance hall musician suggested that Mokava should entertain his friends. This was a welcome suggestion. It harmonized with the dreams that were constantly in the mind of Mokava. He would entertain his friends, and everybody was his friend.

A subsequent night found the new home lighted throughout and a motley throng in the height of raucous hilarity. Capitalists, brokers, gamblers, prospectors, saloon men, and women from the dance halls, drank and danced and ate, swore and laughed, sang and cried, until late hours in the morning. Dance hall musicians pronounced Mokava's piano the finest in camp, and Mokava's heart swelled.

Tehana stayed close in her tepee. The drunken revellers tried to drag her forth, but she stubbornly held her place. When Mokava went to persuade her to come and meet his friends, she said in her native tongue:

"They make big fool of you; they cannot make fool of me. It will not last. Mokava let his white blood run him crazy. It will be different. You will wake up very soon."

"It is all for Nevada!" replied Mokava.

"She is lost now," replied Tehana. "Grant and Amosa are the same as lost to me, too. Money affects you the same as fire water affects Indian, Mokava. But you will sober up!"

Despite the character of many of the guests, the interior of Mokava's home reminded the more thoughtful ones of their own homes and their families and aroused that feeling that comes to every man in the solitudes. Many of them had come to the desert to cast their last dice in the game of fortune, and many of them were now enthusiastic in the belief that they were holding the high hand. They believed that the town of Mokava was destined to be a city, and that with the coming of all of the things that cities bring the place would be a suitable habitation upon which to settle for life.

"As soon as we get schools I will bring in my family," remarked one. This was taken up by a group of men who began discussing the matter seriously. They had churches started, and other public institutions, but had overlooked schools, as there were no children yet, except the half-breeds of Mokava.

"I build a school house," said Mokava, who had overheard the conversation.

"But it will be too late this season," explained an attorney. "The tax levy was made while the town of Mokava was merely an oasis out here in the desert. No thought was then given to the fact that gold would be discovered at its threshold, and that a city would spring up before the year was over. There has been no provision for funds to sustain a school in the district of Mokava."

"I employ teacher—bring on your families!" said Mokava.

The conversation was interrupted by some late arriv-

als. Mokava rushed to the door and greeted one of the men with open arms. It was his old friend, Thomas Lansing, the surveyor who had taken Nevada to the Indian school for Mokava. Lansing had accompanied the superintendent of the new railroad and the manager of the construction department to Mokava on a business trip. They had come to make final arrangements about depot and terminus grounds. The road was now within fifty miles of the place and would advance its temporary terminus ten miles nearer within a week. While the railroad men were being entertained by Robert Ray, who was now the president of the chamber of commerce, Mokava was plying Lansing with questions.

"I saw her two months ago," explained the surveyor. "She is well and happy, except that she longs to see you and the children and—her mother. She will graduate at the head of her class next month. She is the favorite with her teachers and her classmates and everybody that sees her. She gets prettier every day, Mokava. She does not show her Indian blood, except in her eyes, and looks odd in her surroundings—looks like an angel among those other descendants of the savage race."

"No say savage, friend! Her mother no savage. She good woman. She better than any of the white women here. They drink and— Tehana no think of doing what they do. Look now," concluded Mokava, pointing to one of his women guests who was in the middle of the floor dancing, with her dress pulled far

above her knees and staggering and singing in maudlin condition.

"This is not a fair sample," replied Lansing. "Wait until the better element of women come—the wives and daughters of men!"

"Are not these the daughters of men?" asked Mokava earnestly.

The party was breaking up. The crowds were shaking the hand of Mokava and thanking him for the first entertainment in the camp. It was all whole-souled appreciation, and Mokava received the compliments like a blushing child. When the railroad men left they were accompanied to the door by Ray, Mooring and Brush.

"We have just invited your friends here to come out next week and be our guests for a day at our camp," said the railroad superintendent. "We have asked them to bring along a few friends. We shall expect you."

Mokava looked to Ray for approval and receiving it, accepted the invitation.

When the last guest had departed each had carried away the assurance of Mokava:

"Bring on your families. I build school house and furnish teacher!"

It was in the hushed silence of the night that Mokava saw visions of his own forming. They were selfish visions at that. He had never entertained selfish thoughts before. Yet it would perhaps be doing him an injustice to call them selfish. They were design-

ing, it is true, but they were plans for his own flesh and blood. He did not consider himself in the matter.

"I will build the school house," he soliloquized. "That will bring the men's wives and their children. I told them I would employ the teacher. I will. Nevada will come soon. She will arrive when the other women are coming. She will meet them. She is educated now and will be one of them."

Then his thoughts became too close to his heart for utterance. He saw them spread out on a background like a moving picture drama. He saw Nevada, the daughter of Tehana, in the new school room which he had planned, and which he now saw standing out on the hill overlooking the town. She was teaching the children of the white people. Amosa and Grant were among her pupils. There on the site of the old home, where they were born—in a state of semi-savagery—Nevada and Amosa and Grant would be accepted upon an equal footing with the other people of the town which bore his name.

He saw Nevada at her piano entertaining. Lansing had told him she was proficient in music. Nevada would raise the family out of the depths to which he had dropped, and from which the children had sprung. His own flesh and blood would do it! It was the white man's God after all that had sent the thirsty prospectors to his lonely abode in the desert.

Thus dreamed Mokava, who bore no name except the one the Indians had given him. Thus hoped Mokava, who knew not how he had been lost or found out there. But he finally fell asleep and his dreams were repeated over and over.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT FLUNKY OVERHEARD

“TRY to keep sober today, Flunkey; there will be big doin’s,” cautioned the head cook. “The big bosses are going to dine with us and they will have guests from the city of Mokava. We want to show them that the Desert Construction Company can do something besides build railroads. We want to show them that we know how to prepare chuck and serve it to the bon tons; that feeding hoboos is not the limit of our culinary art.”

“I’ll need half a dozen bracers to do justice to the occasion,” replied a medium-sized, bewhiskered man with several weeks of extra growth of hair on an otherwise well shaped head, at the same time adopting action to his words by taking a flask from a hidden corner and pouring a goodly portion of its contents into an ordinary coffee cup.

“Go slow there!” cautioned the first speaker.

“Did you ever see me unequal to an occasion?” replied the short man with a question, as was his custom.

“I have seen you when I wouldn’t like to be an occasion depending upon you,” smiled the man at the coal range.

The two laughed over the wordy altercation, though it was the one thousandth of a similar kind. It was the privilege of every one to stir up Flunkey when they

felt like it. A fellow out there liked the idea of being rasped occasionally by a smooth-toothed file, and those who rubbed up against Flunkey's repartee usually got it to the quick, and it furnished amusement for the others.

The construction camp had been astir since long before daylight in preparation for the coming of the Mokava party. Men had been required to clean up and the camp generally wore a Sunday appearance. The railroad superintendent had not secured the signatures of Mooring & Brush to the deed to the terminal grounds at Mokava, and he expected to close the matter that day.

"Fill your punch with sticks," he had said to the camp bartender, "and don't let your cocktails go to sleep!"

"Try 'em on me first," suggested Flunkey, after the superintendent had passed on with instructions for others.

The visitors arrived at the noon hour in automobiles, dust-stained and hungry. The punch and cocktails were welcomed by those who drank, and a good fellowship was established before the luncheon began.

"No, no! I no drink," said Mokava, "I see too much trouble already from drinking fire water when I was boy among Injuns."

Robert Ray tipped the glasses lightly for sociability's sake. John Mooring drank formally and glanced at Brush with a look of warning. Brush reddened and drank moderately. Other members of the party imbibed according to their inclinations and prejudices.

The meal was finished and cigars were being passed when the construction manager called for his entertainers. He said that it was rather an impromptu program. Quartets of singers came forth in overalls and jumpers, and sang songs out there in the desert that brought tears and laughter to the audience; monologists came out in freshly washed ducks, with unkempt heads and unshaven faces and received encores for original jokes, adapted to the occasion; clowns came forward and forced tears of laughter from men who had seen the best performances in the world; Shakespearian readers recited extracts from the immortal bard that stirred men's very souls. From the sublime to the ridiculous, the construction camp furnished exponents of every phase of life in its true and dramatic colors in the way of entertainment for the visitors.

"You see," said the construction manager, "we have representatives here from every walk of life. We have not only showmen, but artists, lawyers, doctors, musicians—every profession, trade and calling. They fail for one reason or another, take to the road or get in jail, and after being compelled to move on from town to town and city to city, until they have all the spirit knocked out of them, they fall in with us.

"We give them substantial food and a place to sleep. This satisfies them for a time and they work like galley slaves. But they finally tire of this, hope for better things, move on, fail again or get in jail and land in another construction camp. That is the material with which we build railroads in this country. If it

THE TOLL OF THE SANDS: 101

was not for human failures railroad building would cost more."

"And this is the white man's way," remarked Mokava in a low voice to his friend, Robert Ray.

"I nearly forgot," continued the host. "We have a most interesting character here whom I want all of you to see. He—but judge him for yourselves. Waiter, send Flunkey out!"

The short, unkempt assistant to the cook was slow in making his appearance. He had two reasons; he was averse to exhibiting himself to a crowd, though he was always keen for a clash with his friends; the other reason was, he had drunk too many of the cocktails which had been intended for the guests.

He came after a time, staggering out of the cook car. He approached the long plank table around which the party was seated, and stumbled up to the rear of the place occupied by Mooring and Mokava.

"Gentlemen," began the construction manager, "this is Mr. Flunkey. He is the double, inexhaustible brain-power of the camp. He is our walking encyclopedia—when he is able to walk—and when he sits, from being unable to walk, he still maintains his mental equilibrium! Flunkey, meet the gentlemen from the great mining city of Mokava."

The men rose about the table and bowed with mock politeness to the unique figure that had been so uniquely introduced. Flunkey forced open his drowsy eyes and looked about the party from face to face. When Mooring and Mokava turned to greet him, Flunkey glanced back and forth at the faces of the two men,

his eyes protruding at first with astonishment and then assuming a look of vindictiveness that shook his whole body. His fingers drove their nails into the palms of his hands; his teeth clinched and he bent forward for a moment as if he would leap at the throats of Mooring and Mokava. When the paroxysm passed, he straightened himself to his full height and walked rapidly away without uttering a word or showing any further evidence of intoxication.

"That was too much for Flunkey—he thought he saw doubles!" laughed the railroad superintendent.

"Let us drink to the health of the blond twins!" shouted Brush as the men regained their seats.

"What he mean?" asked Mokava, leaning over close to the ear of Robert Ray.

"He refers to the resemblance of you and Mr. Mooring—you look so much alike, you know," explained Ray.

While the man called Flunkey was looking back and forth between Mooring and Mokava the blood left Mooring's face and an agitation took possession of him similar to that when he first met Robert Ray. Not until he joined in the toast to himself and the settler was he able to throw off the peculiar sensation. All eyes had been turned on Flunkey during the little pleasantries and Mooring's paroxysm had passed unnoticed.

When Flunkey returned to the cook car he approached the man who had been waiting on the men at the table and asked cautiously—

"Who are those two men out there that resemble

each other so much and what relation do they bear to each other?"

"The handsome-dressed fellow is Mooring, the banker at Mokava, and his double, the fellow wearing the hand-me-down rags, is the squaw man for whom the town was named," was the answer.

"Mooring! Mooring!" repeated the assistant to the cook several times, shaking his head doubtfully.

Two hours had passed in private discussion after the meal, between Mooring and Brush and the representatives of the railroad company, when the former two men went to the outskirts of the camp and seated themselves against the wall of a tent and engaged in earnest conversation. Flunkey, who had never permitted the banker to escape from sight after the ludicrous introduction, hurried along the side of a row of tents and entered the one against whose wall the partners were sitting.

When he had seated himself on a bale of bedding near where the men were seated, he heard Brush say: "But the offer is entirely too small, Jack!"

"I know it—at least by fifty thousand dollars—but we need the support of the railroad company," argued Mooring. "But if we can get their support and deposits at this end of the line, and that will necessarily bring the deposits of their employes, it will help us wonderfully, probably save our bacon!"

"But can't we get them up to twenty-five thousand more?" suggested Brush.

"I am afraid to dicker too much—we might drive them away," warned Mooring. "You know the other

fellows are after them hard, and to build the depot that far away would ruin our town despite all of our advantages of location.

"How will we meet that fifty thousand that we counted on in this deal?" asked Brush, anxiously.

"I have just thought of a way to bridge that chasm since we have been sitting here," replied Mooring. "Old Mokava has drawn money right and left of late, and has no idea how his account stands. I write and indorse all of the checks for him, you know. Let's see, he has paid out fifty thousand on that big tepee of his, ten thousand to furnish it, and that piano player worked him for fifteen hundred for that piano. Then he has given five thousand on the city hall, about ten thousand to charity and churches, and has been drawing down for plans on that new school house. Then he has drawn hundreds of small checks, besides. Oh, I can shake his account down for fifty thousand dollars easy, on the installment plan, and he will never be any the wiser. It will all be in my handwriting, you know, and in case of a showdown, his word against mine—white man against squaw man!"

"But the squaw man has been winning just the same—and there's Bob Ray, still on earth and living in Mokava," suggested Brush. "He might get a chance to butt in; it's getting about time for him to stir up another batch of trouble. Instead of relegating him to the discard, you seem to be aiding in having him drawn for the winning hand of late!"

"Leave that to me," boasted Mooring. "I think I

have about eliminated Bob Ray as a trouble maker for us. I issued a sort of ultimatum to him a few nights ago that I think went to the mark. We are getting on pretty good terms now. We have Mokava's money on deposit with us, you know. Then our votes cast for him for the head of the chamber of commerce was not a bad move, though he would have been elected anyway. But little acts like that, when it doesn't cost anything, won't hurt. Swell him up so that the fall of the mighty may come the harder!"

"The fellow may like positions of importance as other mortals do, but I swear that I can see no difference in him," remarked Brush.

"Oh, he's human!" replied Mooring. "He can be reached just as other human beings are reached."

"I don't believe you can do it by bluffing, or fighting, from my observation," philosophized Brush.

"Probably not," agreed Mooring. "But I am trying all of the elements—fighting, kindness, bluffing and soft soap. Which ever one proves the most effectual I shall adopt permanently."

"I would guess that the smoother kind will work best," replied Brush. "You know him better than I do, but I believe he is the kind of a fellow that would follow some of those old mottoes, such as 'Honesty is the best policy,' 'treat your enemies with kindness,' 'but fight like hell when you have to—if you are in the right!'"

"Oh, forget it!" smiled Mooring. "He's the least of our troubles—I'll take care of him," he continued,

as the two rose and went to join the remainder of the party.

The deal was closed later that afternoon for the new railroad terminal grounds at the town of Mokava.

CHAPTER X

MR. HORATIO STALLINGS

“**S**HOW him in!”

A medium, clean-shaven, well-dressed, though badly sunburnt man with intellectual forehead entered the private office of John Mooring, banker. Mooring still held the card which bore the name “Mr. Horatio Stallings.”

Upon looking into the face of the stranger the banker was seized with one of his peculiar attacks. Stallings stood and gazed at him for a moment, his expression changing rapidly. He seemed undecided. At one instant he looked as though he would seize the banker by the throat, and next he started as if he would leave the room. But Mooring quickly recovered and explained, smiling:

“You must excuse me, but I am subject to vertigo at times. What can I do for you?”

“I am a bookkeeper and expert accountant,” began the caller, who quickly recovered his equilibrium, “and have come to the call of your famous little city, which, by the way, has caught the eyes of the world. I wish to secure employment for a while, not so much for the pecuniary compensation as to get acquainted with the actual conditions. Privately,” he continued in a lower tone, “if I can get a practical insight into the situation, and it looks good, I shall be able to control outside capital for investment here.”

"Have you any letters?" asked the banker.

"Not at hand," smiled Stallings, carelessly. "I foolishly got my pocketbooks mixed and the one containing my credentials is in my trunk, which is somewhere in the blockade of traffic on the tracks of your new railroad, over which I came in a manner that might be described as traveling by fits and jerks."

"That is a pretty fair description of conditions," laughed Mooring. "Traffic is in bad shape, but we will be able to clean it up pretty soon. We will get a through train schedule within a month—expect it really much earlier. We were out at the present terminus two days ago and completed the arrangement for the new terminal grounds here. Our company closed the deal—by the way, how much capital can you control for investment here?"

"Considerable," replied Stallings. "I can draw on private sources for a fair amount, and, if things develop to a practical basis I would be able to interest several larger concerns," he continued, mentioning firms whose names were familiar to the banker.

"Call this evening after hours," instructed Mooring.

As Stallings was going out he passed Mokava. The latter was heading for Mooring's private office. Stallings turned and gazed at the settler for a moment, shook his head, and went into the street.

"I like lot on side Burro Hill," said Mokava on entering the office. "It high and healthful for teacher and children up there, and it show up well to strangers when they come in on train."

"We'll have to have a good figure for that prop-

erty," replied the banker. "Brush says it will make a good building site for some of our future millionaires. We ought to hold that acre at ten thousand dollars."

"I know," replied Mokava, "but the land company must do part—ought to sell cheap for school!"

"Oh, well, you may have it for seventy-five hundred, old man," agreed Mooring after considerable dicker-ing. "That ought to be about right," he continued, rising and slapping the settler on the shoulder in a familiar fashion. "That will be a donation on our part of twenty-five hundred—by the way, Mokava, we'll have to begin to look out for a teacher! Families are beginning to come in now and we will have a good population of women and children shortly after the railroad reaches camp. We should show them that we mean business. A school house is not all. We must announce that we have employed a teacher pretty soon. Everybody will have a teacher to suggest, and the sooner we settle on one the quicker we will avoid complications. I have a young lady friend—"

"No, no, no!" interrupted the settler. "Wait till house is done. Then let everybody help name teacher."

"But keep my choice in mind," insisted the banker as Mokava hurried out of the place.

* * * * *

Two weeks had passed since the arrival of Horatio Stallings. He had been busy over the books and letters of the Mooring-Brush Banking Company. He could see Burro Hill from the rear window of the

banking building. The framework of the new school building was climbing slowly from the foundation. Teamsters were unloading building material and carpenters were climbing about the skeleton of a structure like so many snails.

"That structure has already cost the old squaw man about fifty thousand dollars according to his checks, and he hasn't started," meditated Stallings. "It will be interesting to sum up the total when it is completed and furnished!"

Then Stallings shook his head disgustedly and dropped a slip of paper into his pocket.

"Mr. Stallings!"

"Yes, sir!" answered the bookkeeper and expert accountant.

"Mr. Mooring wishes to see you."

Horatio Stallings entered the private office of Banker Mooring.

"Stallings, we've got to meet a large sum in drafts in thirty days," began the banker. "The railroad will be here in another week, and we expect to unload lots and stock by the wholesale on that occasion, but we don't want to take too much chance. How would you like to go to the coast on a scouting trip and try to interest some of the private money of which you spoke, and also stir up some bigger guns by directing their aim toward the wonders of Mokava?"

"It is the thing I would have suggested if the initiative had been put up to me," replied Stallings, enthusiastically.

"Can you leave on tomorrow's auto?" asked the banker.

"I can start at any time," was the reply.

"Then go tomorrow. Take what money you think you will need and draw for more if necessary," instructed Mooring. "You will be expected to raise money!"

"I understand," bowed the accountant as he left the room.

* * * * *

A knock came at the door of Robert Ray late that night. He opened and Horatio Stallings entered without waiting for an invitation.

"Excuse the intrusion," apologized Stallings after closing the door behind him, "but I have come on important business."

"Certainly; sit down," invited Ray suspiciously. Robert Ray had become distrustful of every person that associated with John Mooring of late, and he knew that Stallings was his confidant.

"Mr. Ray," began the visitor, looking the young man squarely in the eyes for nearly a minute before proceeding. "Mr. Ray, I believe that I can broach a delicate subject to you without excessive explanations. I am going to confide in you to a certain extent and insinuate things that I will not now explain. I once confided in men—and in women, too—to the uttermost, but I confide in men now, only so far, and not to women at all.

"But that is neither here nor there," continued Stallings, drawing his chair closer to Ray's, still looking

the young man in the face as if he would read his very soul. "If you do not agree to what I ask you to do, which I assure you upon the honor of a man who will appear to have no honor after I have finished, shall not involve you in any manner, will you give me your word that you will never divulge the subject of my errand?"

"I do not believe that I comprehend you?" hesitated Ray.

"If I brand myself a villain, which time will prove I am not, and I now ask you to do a thing which may not meet your approval, will you agree in advance to forget this interview, so far as others are concerned?"

"Does it or may it compromise me in any manner, or may it involve the rights of others? Would my silence harm any one?" questioned Ray, boring his eyes into those of Stallings.

"It will not involve the rights of nor harm any honest man!" assured the banker's bookkeeper.

"Then I will take a chance," smiled Ray.

"You are a friend of the squaw man?" began Stallings.

"Yes, I am a friend of Mokava's."

"He will do what you ask?"

"That is a little strong. He would probably listen to my advice, and possibly follow it, should it appear to be the right thing," evaded Robert Ray.

"Then, to come straight to the point," continued Stallings in a low voice, "I want you to do two things as quickly as possible—tomorrow, if you can!"

Robert Ray looked at him for an explanation.

"First, have Mokava withdraw every dollar which he has on deposit at Mooring and Brush's bank; second, unload your stock in the Burro Hill property!" warned the bookkeeper.

"But you are employed by Mooring & Brush!" suggested Ray.

"I laid my predicate, as the lawyers say, before I disclosed the purpose of my visit here tonight," smiled Stallings, facetiously.

"Is this move made by you through personal motives—to profit by it?" asked Ray, indignantly.

"Not for financial profit," answered Stallings, quickly.

"How may a man otherwise profit in these days of money-madness?" inquired Ray, philosophically.

"Get revenge!" scowled Stallings.

"Then this is entirely a personal affair of your own, and you would drag others into it to carry your point?" retorted Ray with disgust.

"Personal affair, yes," replied Stallings, "but there is a two-fold purpose in dragging in others, as you call it—I would protect them at the same time in doing so."

"From your own initiative?" asked Ray.

"No, not entirely," explained Stallings. "If I must go farther than I intended, my part in the matter is only incidental. If I had never appeared on the scene you and the squaw man would have lost what I am trying to save you now. In serving others, I am only hurrying what would happen anyway. My interest

in you is selfish, in a way, but you win just the same as if it were an act of your closest friend. By thus aiding you and hurrying you on to save what you are about to lose, I get quicker the thrill that I have sought for nearly a score of years!"

"I believe that I understand you, so far as my interest and that of Mokava is concerned—I will do what you ask," consented Ray, extending his hand.

Stallings hurried out into the night.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. MOORING AND HER DAUGHTER ARRIVE

“IT IS IN accordance with the old saying that it never rains but it pours,” began John Mooring in the conference with Andy Brush in the office of their bank. “Following the withdrawal of his funds by the fool squaw man came a run on the bank in a small way. Men went building mad after that blowout at the squaw man’s house, and his beginning of the new school house started everybody to building homes for their families. That part of it was all right. They put about as much money back for town lots as they took out to buy material and pay carpenters. But Bob Ray did us more harm than all the good that resulted from the building boom when he unloaded his Burro Hill stock on the market. It came nearly starting a panic in stocks.”

“I thought you were going to cop out fifty thousand plunks from the squaw man’s account to meet that cut we made in the railroad terminus deal?” said Andy Brush, testily.

“It was well planned and would have worked if the old blockhead hadn’t gotten some kind of a fool notion into his head and withdrawn his funds so suddenly,” explained Mooring. “There was a peculiar coincidence about that transaction. If I believed anything in the idea that the Lord looks after the weak in affairs terrestrial I should credit Him with a hand in the Mokava

matter. I had begun to prepare for the reimbursement of the fifty thousand sacrifice in the railroad deal by writing a check for ten thousand dollars against the squaw man's account, and went so far as to indorse it for him along with other papers. I remember it well. It was the day before Stallings left.

"But the next day Mokava came in on me unexpectedly for his money and brought Bob Ray along. When he asked for his account, I called it ten thousand less than it really was, to include the bogus check. But he is a foxy old guy, not to be able to read or write. He called for his cancelled checks. I got them, or thought I had them, but the one for the ten thousand was missing. I have never been able to find it. I looked in every nook and corner at the time and have since searched low and high for it. It must have been thrown into the waste basket or destroyed by accident. Anyway, it cost us an even ten thousand. I had to settle in full for fear Bob Ray would cause trouble."

"I thought you were going to manage Bob—that I should only leave him to you!" taunted Brush.

"Well, I am not through yet," replied Mooring. "I don't think he had anything to do with the squaw man drawing out his funds—I just attribute it to some fool notion, or over-persuasion of the other bank people."

"I think I will have to take that fellow Ray in hand," continued Brush. "Where did you first get tied up with him, anyway? You have told me about everything else of your connection with him, but never

how he first pulled the wool over your eyes, and got in with you."

"I met him on the train on my way to Goldfield," explained Mooring. "In the rabble that was rushing in by rail and every other way, I found him, apparently the most congenial of any of those I met. He had a sort of technical education about mining that I thought might be of use. When we reached Goldfield I suggested the prospecting trip, and he has been giving me trouble, as you know, ever since. He is too conscientious—"

"Suspicious," interrupted Brush. "Do you know," he continued, "that it seems to me I have seen that fellow somewhere before? When he showed up at the spring that day, I thought at first that I knew him. Then when he stood there coolly, as if he owned the earth and was dictating terms about that water, I was certain I had run across him in my travels. Then as I left the spring and he walked in and took possession I was sure that I had seen that quick step of his somewhere. He is as light as a panther on his feet. If he had my weight he could lick Jim Jeffries." Then Brush mused to himself. "I sometimes think—but it couldn't be. That fellow wore a cap and he was doubtless a San Francisco longshoresman—no other could have struck such a blow!"

"But, back to business, Andy," interjected Mooring. "It is not a question of who or where he came from. His lack of confidence in Burro Hill proved contagious, and there is no telling how far the epidemic will spread, if we don't stop it. Stallings writes

me that if it had not been for the flooded market he would have been able to raise all of the money we need on the Burro Hill, alone. Now we've got to get it somewhere, but Stallings is still on the job."

"And this fellow Stallings, who is he—are you sure of your man in his case?" asked Brush.

"Positively," replied Mooring. "He is keen as a whip and can get on the inside of things quicker than any man I ever saw before."

"How did you get him? Did he have any references?"

"Yes," replied Mooring, a little piqued. "While we haven't come to requiring references and certificates of family trees in black and white and under seal out here to a universal extent, yet, I assured myself that Stallings was all right. He gave the names of concerns with whom he had done business and I wrote them just before he left. Replies have come since his departure that are perfectly satisfactory— Say, Andy," exclaimed Mooring, suddenly drawing his watch and looking at its face, "I hadn't seen you since I received a letter yesterday announcing the coming of my wife and daughter. They will arrive today on the noon mail auto. It is about due, and I must meet them! Won't you join me. I know they will be glad to meet you again—especially Ruby!"

"Yes, Jack, it will give me great pleasure," replied Brush. "I will run by the saloon and spruce up a little and meet you at the station."

While John Mooring was on his way to meet his wife and daughter he thought of what Andy Brush

had said about Robert Ray. He, like Brush, imagined he had seen Ray somewhere before he met him on the steps of the train pulling out of Oakland. The young man had entered his thoughts a hundred times since they had disagreed.

"What is the trouble with Robert Ray?" he again asked himself. He recalled that Ray had been an ideal companion on the desert. He had always insisted upon doing more than his share of the work involved in prospecting. He had performed most of the duties about camp and had carried the heaviest burdens on the trail. In this, one of the severest tests to which men are subjected, Robert Ray had always proved himself a man.

"If it wasn't for his fool idea of absolute justice—justice to a technicality—even against his own interests," commented Mooring, mentally, "he would be an ideal fellow. I never knew but one person before who stuck to truth so closely, and believed so implicitly in honesty. He is so much like her. And that terrible feeling that came over me when I first met him—and the atmosphere about him—I have sometimes thought, and it is not improbable out here in this rush, where people from everywhere on the globe have come together—but, bosh! The past is dead, and let it be as though it and all who were connected with it are buried. John Mooring, pull yourself together. Quit trembling when you meet strangers. Be yourself—your old self again—and the world will soon be yours!"

Two women alighted from the mail automobile. After emerging from the dust-covered machine, dust-

covered wraps and belongings, and after the dust-covered chauffeur had segregated the personal baggage of the dust-covered women, and they had shaken as much of the dust from their clothing and persons as would yield, Mrs. Annette Mooring bowed to Andy Brush and greeted her husband in this strain:

"Jack Mooring, why did you not tell us that we were to travel the greater portion of the way on a cattle train, and burrow our way the remainder of the journey in an open freight automobile, unprotected from the sun and through sweltering heat, and over miles and miles of sand dunes? Poor Ruby is almost dead, and if I hadn't been kept busy looking after her and telling those railroad men what I thought of them, I suppose I should have broken down. Why didn't you write us that we were saying farewell to civilization and coming to a savage land? We would then, at least, have been prepared for the worst—but nothing as bad as this. Take us to our cave at once. I suppose you have robbed some native of his place of abode?"

Miss Mooring greeted Andy Brush in a friendly manner, though there was a coldness about it that he clearly recognized. Bowing awkwardly he grabbed as much of her baggage as he could conveniently carry and they walked away together, following Mooring and his wife toward the hotel. Mrs. Mooring was continuing her fusillade of comment on the country and everything it contained.

The motley crowd which had gathered at the coming of the automobile, as was their custom, was silent for once. They had heard and seen strange things

out in the desert, but the manner of Mrs. Mooring was so new to them that they were temporarily at a loss to find words for comment. And no one cared to give expression while she was still in ear-shot.

"And they wanted to name the town for her!" finally ventured one.

"She must be one of them suf—suffer—"

"Suffragettes," finished another.

Then the ice was broken and the members of the crowd made such comment as such a scene in such a country would provoke.

Robert Ray was standing on the hotel veranda, conversing with some friends when the Mooring party approached. Suddenly he heard the voice of Ruby Mooring, intermingled with that of Andy Brush. He turned quickly as if he expected to see a ghost. Mooring was near him and raised his hat. Ray responded as his eyes fell on Brush and the young woman. They were close behind Mooring and his wife. Brush glanced at Ray, but his hands were occupied with Miss Mooring's baggage and he did not raise his hat. The young woman looked in the direction of Ray. The blood suddenly left her face and she reeled for one instant as if she would fall. But she quickly regained self-control and a tinge of red followed in her cheeks. Her big, brown eyes looked straight ahead. Brush had not noticed her embarrassment. No one had noticed it except Robert Ray.

Ray drew the loafers from the path of the new arrivals and touched his hat again as the party passed into the hotel, and the screened doors closed behind

them. Robert Ray then hurriently left the place. Andy Brush accompanied the party to the door of their room, where Miss Mooring turned and thanked him. Then he returned to the hotel office where he strutted back and forth like one who had just achieved a great victory.

"Who was the young man—his name—father, who touched the men in the doorway of the hotel and made them get out of our way as we entered, and, at the same time raised his hat to you?" asked Miss Mooring.

"That was Robert Ray," replied her father. "He was with me when I discovered this camp."

"His face looked familiar—I, I—I thought possibly I had seen it before—at first," replied the girl, embarrassed. "It is more open than most of those we have seen since we reached the desert. Most of them look so careworn and troubled. His has not that scowl that is on so many faces."

"You probably saw him the morning I left Oakland," replied Mooring. "He picked up that package and gave it to you as I was getting aboard the train. We continued to travel together to Goldfield, and then came prospecting together. He is too honest for this country. It is made up of men who have had hard lives and who are here to make up for past losses. Young Ray is still in the tenderfoot stage. He believes in an honesty that most men out here have left behind. He is the antithesis of Andy Brush. Andy is playing the game for all it is worth. He has already made a fortune."

"I have always boosted for Andy," interjected Mrs. Mooring with the first smile that had lighted her face for several days.

"Is it men of his type that succeed out here?" asked Ruby with a shudder.

"It isn't honesty, looks nor youth, my child. It is the money that counts nowadays. Jack," she turned to her husband, "have you any sort of entertainment—women's clubs, women's organizations of any kind in this God-forsaken place? Ruby and I shall die if we don't find something to divert our minds from this terrible desert glare. Poor girl, I thought we should find a new country—full of life—society, like we had at Denver, Cripple Creek, Nome and the other places. Where there is so much money there ought to be society and entertainment."

"We have not had time to provide these things," Annette," replied the banker, meekly. "But we soon shall have them all. The railroad will bring them. It was for this reason that I rather desired your early coming. Your services are needed just at this particular time for that very purpose. The work will be ready for you just as soon as you get rested. Women will be arriving from every part of the world, and they need first to get acquainted. Next, they need a leader and organizer. Our business needs the work. Both men and women will have to be looked after, socially. You are the very one to do it."

John Mooring had never been considered a fool, except by his wife. She, at least, told him that he was. But after she had run her course he usually brought

her up suddenly with a little diplomacy that met all purposes. He knew her armor and always kept his eye on a vulnerable spot. This time he had sent a dart straight to the mark.

Leading women's movements and superintending clubs and social functions was her greatest ambition. It is true that she had not succeeded in superintending or leading any particular organization for any great length of time, but she was an enthusiastic starter of things. The banker had drawn aside the curtain and showed her a new stage for operation. She also read between the lines. She was certain of success now. Her husband had never been able to back her before with the magic key that opens the way to leadership in society. It was his first time at the helm of a banking institution.

At the end of two weeks Mrs. Annette Mooring was well known in the town of Mokava. She had met every man, woman and child in the place, including the squaw wife and children of the settler. By personal interviews she knew about the business and troubles, if there were any, of the citizens of the new camp. She had planned half a dozen clubs and other women's organizations, prepared programs for the winter months, suggested the architecture of all of the contemplated homes of the citizens, and had ordered her husband to build a home for herself that would make Mokava's new house look like a suburban cottage in comparison. She had written a woman friend in San Francisco to come out in time to take charge

of the school as soon as Mokava should get the building ready.

Then the announcement came that the railroad would be completed by a certain date and Mrs. Annette Mooring turned her attention to preparing a celebration for this event. She insisted that she would get in a blow on the golden spike that was to be driven, and that she would go further and break the bottle of champagne on the first locomotive that arrived, as a fitting dedication and christening for its departure out into the world to bring men and capital to the city of Mokava.

Then she planned to entertain the railroad representatives, the officers of the chamber of commerce and other important personages at the quarters of the Moorings, after the ceremonies of the day were over. Mrs. Annette Mooring was a busy woman.

* * * * *

It was the evening preceding the day upon which the advent of the railroad was to be celebrated. Mrs. Annette Mooring was conversing with the banker in his private office. The following day would have much to do with his financial affairs. He had not told his wife, but she had learned that her husband had to have money, and that he hoped to get it through the coming of the railroad and through the efforts of Horatio Stallings.

"Who is this man, Horatio Stallings, upon whom so much appears to depend?" asked Mrs. Mooring.

"An expert accountant and bookkeeper by profession," replied the banker, "but a financier by practice."

"How long have you known him. Is he of such an

age that you are certain that he is dependable?" continued the woman.

"I met him out here in the desert, and I should judge that he is old enough to know his business—he is at least fifty," explained the banker.

"He appears to have been gone a long time—you say he is making progress?" asked Mrs. Mooring.

"Yes, he has worked under difficulties. Some of the new mining camps have failed. This necessarily weakened confidence outside. Then Robert Ray unloaded his stock in the Burro Hill property, the best we have, and that weakened our best asset. But Stallings has several things in view. Here is his last letter, you may read it while I am checking up a matter in the next room."

Mooring handed the letter to his wife and stepped into the main room of the building. When he returned a few minutes later he found her sitting like a statue, her eyes transfixed on the writing.

He looked at her inquiringly.

"I am not feeling well," she said sinking limply into her chair.

CHAPTER XII

ROBERT RAY MEETS RUBY MOORING

RAILROAD day dawned on busy men. Some of the rails had to be laid for the final completion of the tracks, and ties had to be leveled and tamped. The sun rose red across the desert wastes and glistened on the gay decorations which adorned the town of Mokava. Those who had slept at all were up early, and those who had been up all night refused to go to bed. It was the first gala day for the camp; and it was an important day for the town and everybody in it.

There had been but little mining in the place, and mining was its sole dependence. The outcroppings indicated that there might be wealth beneath, but the matter had not been tested. While a contagious boom is on it requires but little of the virus to infect large numbers. But the contagion had about run its course. Those who came grub-staked had exhausted their resources, and surface indications no longer satisfied the investor. He demanded to know what was beneath and behind this call for his money. The fascination of inaccessibility would now be removed, and the camp would have to stand upon its real merits. The railroad would relieve all doubt. It would bring men and machinery who would make the test.

It was an important day for other reasons than the testing of the stability of the camp itself. The first

train would bring the families of men who had been roughing it out there in the desert until they were almost estranged from their relatives. Later trains would bring more families. The long separated would be reunited and life was to be started over in a new field. Whether or not this should be successful or permanent depended largely on what was beneath the surface of Burro Hill.

The man, Mokava, was much concerned. He had been transferred from an idle monotonous life in the lonesome desert to a most strenuous business life in a miniature modern city. The past few months had consisted of a jumble of surprises, busy days, sentiment, realizations, hopes and visions. He had yet to meet with his first real disappointment. He had been discouraged, but everything had worked out like magic in his favor. The recovery of his rights in the spring, the payment for his grounds, the naming of the town, all had come his way. Mooring had thrown a temporary chill on his hopes when he suggested the choosing of the teacher, but Mokava expected to overcome this as other troubles caused by Mooring had been mastered.

The majority had always been with the settler and he could not see why it should not continue to champion his cause, especially, where it was so close to his heart. For the spring he would have at first willingly accepted a mere water right with others. For his lands he would have accepted the little plot around his rock hut, the adobe and tepee. He would have

given his interest in Burro Hill freely. But for all of these he had been paid liberally.

Everything of the past and the future now centered on the one hope still lingering in Mokava's breast. Through Nevada he expected to realize this hope—everything to him. The school building was now about completed and Nevada would come pretty soon. He would then take Robert Ray into his confidence and tell him about his scheme to have Nevada chosen as teacher. It would be like seeing her seated on a throne; it would be the climax of his earthly desires. He had built the house out of his own funds. He would pay the teacher. Why should it not be Nevada?

Mrs. Annette Mooring was confined to her room. She informed her daughter that she would not be able to leave her room for some time; that it was the most serious nervous attack she had ever had, and she would have to keep free from excitement for several days. Ruby would have to go alone to the dedication services. Mrs. Mooring would have her easy chair placed near the window of her room, from which point she could witness the ceremony.

John Mooring was rather pleased than worried over his wife's condition. She had been subject to nervous spells for the past few years, and it was when she was ailing that Mooring found the greatest relief. She did not then, at least, meddle with his affairs. The attack at the bank was rather out of the ordinary. Mooring hardly understood it. She did not usually bother over his business troubles. And, the letter from

Stallings, though rather indefinite as to furnishing relief under the present stress, was not of such a character as to cause alarm. Under ordinary conditions Mrs. Mooring would have passed it without comment. But she probably was becoming more concerned with her advancing years. Well, anyway, he would be saved from any humiliation for the day.

The first oral demonstration came from a crowd which had gathered about the workmen who were placing the last rail of the track. Their shouts hurried the gathering of the people. A curl of smoke had been discerned far out on the shimmering desert. The first locomotive, attached to passenger cars, was drawing slowly toward the town of Mokava.

Robert Ray joined the throng. Since the arrival of Ruby Mooring he had been a restless man. He had seen her at a distance a few times when she was on her way to and from the bank. Her mother was usually with her. Then he caught a glimpse of her once when he was passing the hotel on the opposite side of the street. It had been accidental. He was hurrying along with his mind absorbed with Ruby Mooring when something caused him to look up. He saw for one brief moment the object of his thoughts standing by an open window. He turned his head quickly in the other direction, but not before he had seen the figure disappear from the window hastily. She had been looking at him, and when he looked up the mutual embarrassment caused each to escape in his own way.

"She will think that I am persistently ogling her,"

thought Ray, as he increased his steps. "She is friendly with Brush. Her father and I are enemies—that is, her father considers me his enemy. Brush has never recognized me. She will never tell about that little episode in the room at San Francisco. Doubtless she has forgotten it. But she recalled it when she first saw me on her arrival in camp. She came near to collapsing. Maybe she feared I would attack Brush again."

Then Ray recalled the report that Brush had been a frequent caller at the Mooring quarters since their arrival. Doubtless Ray had often been the subject of their discussion. What the father had overlooked in painting Ray's shortcomings to the family, Brush had probably supplied.

"But she was human and a woman, and a woman never forgets a kindness," mused Ray. But he recalled that once when he met Mrs. Mooring on the street she had elevated her chin to an unnecessary height. He felt that he was in bad standing with the women, as well as with the man, of the Mooring family. Through fear that his recognition might in some way injure Ruby Mooring in connection with the fight in her room in San Francisco, he had fled from the hotel quickly after her arrival in camp. Since that time he had sneaked about the camp in the routine of his business as if haunted with guilt of some kind. He did not know why he did it.

"What is the matter with you, you fool?" he had asked himself a dozen times. "You have been accustomed to women all of your life; had sweethearts and

thought you loved them! Who is this sainted being that cows you like a knave; that makes you feel that you are the most insignificant creature on earth?"

Then he would imagine temporarily that he had thrown off the peculiar spell and laugh at himself. But the old feeling came back just as quickly and he found himself again unable to shake off her image.

He had come to the celebration of the advent of the new railroad as he had walked about the streets of late. It would be a new punishment to see her—probably she would be accompanied by Andy Brush! But still, he would be disappointed if he did not see her. He would look on, if she came, from among the restless crowd, when she would not be aware of it. It was all silly, it was true, but he could not rise above it.

The train was coming and the crowd had gathered in a circle about the point where the golden spike was to be driven. Robert Ray edged his way into the throng and was examining the faces cautiously on the other side. Some one jostled into him in the crush. He turned and met with a surprise that nearly knocked him from his feet.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ray, I do not believe you have met my daughter, Miss Ruby," apologized John Mooring, who had been the offender. "This is Mr. Ray, daughter. He and I were the pioneers here, as you have already been told."

Before Mooring had time to continue further conversation some one called him and he left Ruby Mooring in the care of Robert Ray.

Ray stood in an awkward silence, blushing like a

school girl before the handsome young woman. If Burro Hill had suddenly turned to solid gold and Ray had been the owner of it in fee simple, he would not have been happier. Was it a dream, such as he had awakened from so often with disappointment since he had first seen her, or was it real this time? He was afraid to move or speak for fear she might vanish. Then he heard her voice! She had waited for him to speak until the silence was awkward.

"I have heard much of you, Mr. Ray," she began, "but not through father. He never talks much at home."

"You have not heard much that was good of me?" ventured Ray.

"Oh, yes, lots of good things, I assure you! You are a friend of the Mokava family; they are so interesting. Then, mother learned of how you saved father's life. Mokava told her. You are also regarded as the father of the camp. Quite a youthful father, but one apparently very devoted. I had the pleasure of seeing you the first day of our arrival, for a second, and have seen you a few times since—at a distance. You appear always to be in a hurry—busy. I have been anxious for an opportunity, under calmer circumstances, to thank you for your bravery that night. You have seemed to evade me. I had longed so much to see you again. I was afraid that you might somewhere be laboring under the fear that a crime was hanging over your head—and I—I was the cause, you know!"

As much as Ray would have liked to hear more, he changed the subject. Brush was still living and Miss

Mooring was by his side. Why talk about the past? "I am not the father of the camp—I did not bring this rush," began Ray, "but I feel a responsibility. We have a serious problem. The camp is experimental. We have gotten a lot of outside money on a shoe-string, as it were, and I feel anxious about the outcome. It is all guess work yet, and it would prove a great disappointment should the innocent people who have invested their savings lose them—it would be a crime."

"I thought that if men succeeded nowadays they did not worry about the other fellow," replied the young woman. "In my limited education in modern business methods and finance, especially in mining, I had begun to think it was all pretty much of a gamble, and that the fellow who wins doesn't worry much about the one who loses."

"That is true in a general sense," replied Ray, thinking of the source from which Miss Mooring had obtained her 'education,' "I am no better than others, but I feel the responsibility a little heavier here. As you suggest, I am in the position of a sort of father of the camp, having been among the first to discover it, and I would not like to have a lot of losses from wild-catting schemes charged to me."

"Then you haven't much faith in the permanency of the camp, Mr. Ray?" suggested Miss Mooring.

"It isn't justified," replied Ray. "As I said, it is all speculative. The surface only has been scratched, and we do not know what is beneath. Money that has been invested by outsiders for development work

has gone over the gambling tables and saloon bars, to a greater extent, and we have nothing to show for it. It will be a sore disappointment to the women should the camp prove a failure, after they have gone through the hardships of coming into the desert, and expecting so much."

"We are used to it," replied the girl. "We have been buffeted about ever since I can remember. That is, father and mother have. They went to Cripple Creek, Nome, Klondike, and—everywhere where there was gold excitement. I was left in school until just before I met you, so that I am now having my first personal experience. Here comes father, and—I hope that I may see more of you, Mr. Ray," she said as she bowed and joined the banker and his partner.

Mooring inclined his head with an open smile to Ray as they walked away. Andy Brush ignored his presence altogether, and directed his attention to Ruby Mooring.

"And I put in the whole time talking business to that young girl, as if she were a man and interested in such things!" meditated Ray, reproachfully.

When the train pulled up to the rail which was to be secured by the golden spike, the crowd surged about the coaches. The meeting of families out there in the desert, after separation in many cases for years, was one of the features of Railroad Day. But the contemplated early departure of the first train required that the ceremonies proceed, and Andy Brush appeared as the head of the town committee with a miniature railroad spike made of gold that had been

contributed by all of the claim owners of the camp. Ruby Mooring and her father were standing on the opposite side of the circle, and they were both watching Brush.

Ray recalled with a tinge of jealousy that he was chairman of the chamber of commerce, and should have been the man to present the golden spike, instead of Andy Brush. But his jealousy subsided within the next minute.

"Will our fellow-townsmen, Mr. Mokava, please come forward?" asked Brush, in a loud voice.

The settler came forward as timid as a girl and was introduced by Brush to the railroad superintendent of construction and the audience in pretty fair form—better form, in fact, than Ray thought Brush capable of following.

The superintendent delivered a short address and then instructed the settler to place the spike and drive it into the tie as the connecting link between the town which bore his name and the outside world. Mokava tremblingly placed the emblem at the point fixed and raised the heavy sledge above his head and struck with all his force. The hammer descended in the nervous hands of the settler and struck the spike a glancing blow. It flashed one time in the bright sunlight as it shot through space and buried itself somewhere in the soft desert sands.

"There goes all of the gold in camp!" shouted a wag as a climax to the embarrassing situation.

"That's all right, ladies and gentlemen," shouted the railroad superintendent of construction after a fruit-

less search for the lost spike, "we now have a little surprise for you. Gather about the front of the locomotive, while we finish the ceremony."

A step-ladder was brought from the Pullman and placed by the side of the cow-catcher. The engine was still puffing and trembling like a thing of life.

"Give way for the Queen of the Desert!" shouted the manager of ceremonies.

The crowd parted by the side of the locomotive and Thomas Lansing, the engineer, came forward followed by a small figure whose identity was concealed by a large light ulster and an automobile veil. When they reached the step-ladder the ulster and veil were removed and a pretty dark-eyed young woman ascended the steps and mounted the side of the locomotive with graceful ease.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted the master of ceremonies, "There is nothing more appropriate for the dedication of the first locomotive that has just arrived from the outside world into your magic little city, and for the christening of that same locomotive, which is soon to leave for the outside world again, to bring her men and her women and her money to develop your great resources and build up your city than to have the little queen of the desert, who was born near the spot where I now stand, spill this bottle of pure wine which is to assure the safety and success of this great railroad enterprise, and the success of the city which is its terminus! Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce—"

"Nevada!" shouted Mokava who had just recovered

sufficient courage after his failure to drive the spike to approach the new scene of the ceremonies.

"Nevada! Nevada!" cried Grant and Amosa, who gazed up, astonished, at their sister, whom they had not recognized at first.

The bottle of wine was given to Nevada and she was told to throw it with all her might against the rim of the front part of the locomotive.

She drew back her arm with its full length and hurled the bottle with all her strength!

It missed the mark and glanced out into the desert sands beyond!

"That's enough—two signs of bad luck in one day!" shouted a gambler.

"And it's Friday, too!" called another.

"It's the luckiest day of my life," said Robert Ray to himself.

But in another instant he was not so certain. He heard the coarse voice of Andy Brush and looked in its direction. In the scrambling crowd, which was now breaking away, Ruby Mooring had taken Brush's arm. John Mooring had left his partner to escort Miss Mooring to her home.

"Can it be after all," ran through Ray's mind, "that they intend to sacrifice—marry their daughter to that ruffian, gambler and libertine?"

CHAPTER XIII

A TRIBAL LEGEND

“I DO not approve of this, Ruby; and, remember it shall be your last call—it is not a call; it is just a slumming expedition,” frowned Mrs. Annette Mooring. “You will disgrace us—we cannot afford to associate with Indians!”

“She is just as nice, mother, as if she were white. She is whiter than you or I—I mean her skin is much whiter than yours or mine,” replied Ruby Mooring. “She’s such a darling little thing, too, isn’t she, Mr. Ray? She’s sensible and good and so unassuming! Why should the fact that she has Indian blood in her veins ostracize her from the society of white people? She couldn’t help it!”

“You don’t understand, daughter,” replied Mrs. Mooring, impatiently. “The best citizens are cutting her and you know we must not antagonize these people. Your father is a banker; besides, we must remember our station always! This is the last call that you will make at the home of the squaw man. Remember, this is final. And you, Mr. Ray, you will have to cut out your visits either at the Indian or Mooring home!”

This did not meet the approval of Robert Ray. He had been a stickler for conventionalism in his rearing but he had changed his mind as he grew older. He did not consider heritage a safe basis upon which to judge either men or women. He had been given

an illustration at the town of Mokava that tended to confirm this theory. He saw a pure and magnanimous heart exhibited by a plain squaw man, whose ancestry was unknown and whose environment had been that of a savage race. Upon the other hand when he started out prospecting with John Mooring, who was supposed to possess the best of inheritance, and who had been reared in a boasted civilization, he had expected the very best of him. But the very worst had developed from this creature of the refined world.

Another change of opinion, as well as of heart, on the same subject followed his better acquaintance with Ruby Mooring. He had feared that nothing good could come from John Mooring, or even from continued association with him, before fortune threw him into almost daily contact with Mooring's daughter. But since he met her on Railroad Day it had been easy sailing. For some reason, which he did not care to question, the Moorings had opened their doors to him. This had not changed his private estimate of them, however, but had given him an opportunity to get better acquainted with their daughter. He was more certain than ever that she had not inherited any of their bad traits. He had reached the conclusion also, that every person was his or her own architect, and that they would be good or bad, win or lose, according to their own inclination and work.

"Look at Mokava," he argued to himself. "No one knows who he is or where he came from, but he has a heart as pure as any woman and the soul of a saint. Then there is Nevada. She is the daughter of an

ignorant squaw, yet she is as refined and sensible as I would have my own sister. And, Ruby," here he spoke more guardedly even in his thought speech, "one could scarcely believe that she is the daughter of Jack Mooring and that—her mother. They are each positive misrepresentations of what God doubtless intended them for. For instance, Mooring is an unscrupulous ingrate, a trickster, who would rather get money dishonestly than legitimately, who would betray a friend or stoop to the vilest thing, when standing by his friend and pursuing an upright course would get the same results.

"And his wife—a mannish woman, a suffragette, a failure of her sex. She would desert her post, trespass somewhere, even try to invade the sphere intended for man. She is one of God's latest curses sent upon the world.

"But Ruby—she is sensible, reasonable, refined, effeminate—she possesses every trait which neither her father nor mother has, and is devoid of any of their characteristics. If there is anything in blood and inheritance, one would be forced to believe that Ruby is not their child."

"Pardon me for apologizing for my mother," said Ruby Mooring when she and Robert Ray were well on their way to the home of Mokava, "but she is not altogether responsible of late, I fear. She has not always been as she is now. She is much worse since the last spell at the bank. When I first remember she was so much different. She thought more of the home, and questions of a public nature and women's clubs did not

prey so much upon her mind. While she always had an inclination for a public life—I mean an inclination to be a leader of others—she was rather modest about it at first.

“She has been worried a great deal since I began to grow up. She seems to dread for me and my future. I don’t understand it. I often catch her gazing at me when she doesn’t know I am aware of the fact, and she appears as if her heart would break. I do not understand it.”

“It is a mother’s natural anxiety for the future of her daughter,” said Ray. “And she should be interested in such a daughter! Why, she is the—”

“No flattery, please; it is a serious matter with me. I am worried about mother. Father does not know. He has never been at home much. She says she was happy after her marriage until I was about a year old. She tells me this, but never mentions the matter in father’s presence. Since then she says her life has grown more wearisome until she has lost all interest, so far as home affairs are concerned. And I really don’t believe she cares much for life itself. It is so sad. She admits when she is confidential that these new foolish fads of women offer her a more miserable way of putting in an otherwise miserable life. She says it is a place where women who have made failures or mistakes in life may undergo a sort of self-punishment. While she talks women’s rights and urges women to exercise them at the polls, and in other public affairs, in public, at home she quietly admits to me that the only true place for woman is the

home, and her only sphere is the old one people believed in when they followed the theory that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

Nevada met them at the door with her accustomed happy smile. The parlor was a beauty spot in comparison with the hotel quarters and other places in the camp, and Nevada had brought with her from the dormitory of the Indian school little ornaments of Indian manufacture that set off the odd places about the walls with pleasing effect. Amosa and Grant were neatly appareled and were sitting silently on a sofa with eagerness depicted on their faces.

"I know you will excuse me for permitting the children to remain for a little while," apologized Nevada. "They are so fond of music, and they have doubtless tired of hearing me drum on the piano. They have been crazy about your playing ever since you played for them the last time you were here, Miss Ruby, and they could not be suppressed when they were told that you were coming this evening."

Ray was compelled to note the changed appearance in the children under the hand of Nevada. He noted the difference in their demeanor and dress today and that when he first saw them when he came to consciousness in the little rock house. It was especially of their dress and personal appearance that he took notice. The children had been quiet and modest, even out there where they had never seen the evidences of refinement, except that inherent trace that was always exhibited by their father.

The playing and singing had ceased and the chil-

dren had gone reluctantly to their beds. Nevada had been waiting for an excuse to again explain her awkwardness on Railroad Day. Her failure had caused her much humiliation.

"I cannot get over being ashamed of myself," she repeated. "Mr. Lansing scolded me outright. He said he had come to doubt that I had any Indian blood in my veins; that the smallest amount of Indian blood should have kept me from losing my head; that I reminded him of the class known as broken down aristocracy, which does not know how to do anything but pretend. He was all put out about the matter. But I didn't care so much for my failure as that of poor father. He takes it to heart. It is a serious thing with him. He had about forgotten an old legend of my mother's tribe, which has always hung like a sword of Damocles above his head, and now he lays it to that and is almost hopeless."

"Do you believe in superstitions, Miss Nevada?" asked Ray, reminded of the discussions that he had heard among the gamblers following the occurrence on Railroad Day.

"Not in the light of modern education, Mr. Ray," replied the girl with a tone of humiliation in her voice.

"You have an advantage over me," apologized Robert Ray quickly. "I was reared in the South where the old superstitions of the negroes are driven into the white youth by word of mouth, and I confess that I cannot get it out of my system."

"Then you can sympathize with father," replied Nevada. "Mother believes implicitly in the old legend

which she holds over father's and the rest of our heads. Father does not believe in it seriously all of the time, but he has a doubt and when anything occurs derogatory to his plans he lays it to that old legend."

"Tell it to us!" insisted the two in one voice.

"Oh, it is so silly—not even interesting," replied Nevada.

"It will interest me," insisted Robert Ray. "Things are not going right in the town of Mokava. There is something wrong somewhere, and it may be that there is significance in these superstitions. Tell us about it and we will draw our own deductions."

"It is ridiculous—just a tribal legend, you know," began Nevada. "It was a custom in my mother's tribe, as it is in most Indian tribes, you know, for the suitor to offer a price and pay it for his bride, if required, and the price was usually demanded. When the suitor first asked the hand of his intended bride of her father, he also asked the price. He was informed of the terms and the suitor either paid the price then and there or brought it along on the wedding day.

"Well, according to the legend of my mother's tribe, a chief came a long way to woo a girl of the tribe—the daughter of the chief. He failed to ask the price and the chief reminded him of the custom. Whereupon the suitor, who had friends secreted nearby, sounded the call and they set upon the chief and his followers, took the girl by force and made their escape.

"They were married according to the ceremonies of

the marauding chief's tribe, but the curse of mother's ancient tribal laws was upon them. That curse was that the bride and groom and their offspring should never prosper. On the contrary they should most miserably fail; they should become outcasts from their people; their offspring should not be blessed with posterity, and that everybody with whom any of them should come in contact should also be accursed; everything they should touch should fail, and that particular family should finally perish in solitude, and in a most ignominious manner!

"Father was found on the desert in his mother's arms while he was still a baby. He belonged to a band of immigrants who were on their way to California. His mother was the only one, besides father, of the entire party who survived. And she yielded father up later with her dying breath to the chief of the band of Indians who found them. He was mother's father. Well, father grew up in the tribe. But when he came to ask for the hand of mother the usual price was mentioned. He laughed at the custom and said it was a relic of savagery.

"'If you do not pay for your squaw now, you will pay the price in the penalty of the curse!' warned mother's father."

"So father and mother were driven from the tribe. Mother has often grieved very much over the matter. She believes everything will come out just as predicted in the legend. Father scorned the terms of the curse until recently. He and mother were happy with

us children until the white men came. But since then the old legend has worried him.

"His failure to drive the golden spike on Railroad Day and my failure to break the bottle of wine are attributed by mother to the old tribal curse. Father has about concluded, after all, that there is something in the old legend."

"Poor Nevada," sympathized Ruby Mooring on their way home. She is so good. Her case is so sad. I am sorry that mother has forbidden me to visit her. I should like so much to see her often. I prefer her companionship most to that of other women in camp. Her color should not be held against her. Besides, I do not see why Indian blood is to be despised."

"It is the way of the world," replied Ray, "and it appears that women must bow to the rules of society, whether right or wrong. It is not so strict with men, and if it were, I suppose I would be rather stubborn."

"And I fear there will be still greater disappointment for her from what I have heard," said Ruby as the two were entering her home.

"Yes," replied Ray, "but it will hurt Mokava more than it will Nevada."

"And you, you will not regard mother's prohibition against your visiting the Mokavas seriously?" said Ruby. "She will not think of the matter again, possibly—as to you. But with me the requirement is final."

"I will manage it in some way that no harm will come of it," assured Ray as he took his leave.

CHAPTER XIV

OSTRACIZED

“IT IS a good thing that Mooring got the certified check on the other bank for one thousand dollars from the squaw man before the teacher’s election, Eva, or you would have had to depend upon the public for your salary, and the public is poor dependence in such matters,” said Mrs. Annette Mooring. “You’ve got to give it to John Mooring when it comes to foxiness in delicate work, if he is thick-headed about some things!”

“They say that the squaw man expected his daughter to get the position,” replied Miss Eva Martin.

“Yes, poor Bob Ray placed her name before the meeting and he and Mokava and a few others voted for the girl, but Ray knew it was a hopeless case,” explained Mrs. Mooring. “You must not blame Bob; he’s a sort of guardian for the old squaw man, and couldn’t very well refuse to support the half-breed girl on that account. Say, she’s as smart and pretty as she can be. Ruby says she is just as good with it all. I had to break Ruby away from the place. She is just like all silly girls of her age—would do the very thing she should not do.

“Do you know, she would have just taken up all of her spare time at the Indian home if I hadn’t set my foot down hard against any further association with those semi-savages?”

"I dread tomorrow's ordeal," worried Miss Martin. "They say that the squaw man's children are getting ready for school with bright anticipations. It looks so hard to send them back home, especially after their father has built the school house and is actually paying my salary!"

"Tush, Eva! You were always so sentimental," scolded Mrs. Mooring. "Wait until you have been in the world, and known it as long as I have. Such little things will not trouble you then. Why, it will be a novel experience! The whole town—the better element, at least—will be with you. You will be a heroine. You will be the one to draw the social line. I wish I were you just to enjoy the fun of seeing those half-breeds open their big black eyes with amazement when you tell them to run along back to their squaw mother."

"I don't believe I can tell them—I don't know how to begin," said Miss Martin.

"That will be easy," began Mrs. Mooring. "But you might lose your head. I will fix it for you. I will write a note to hand to them. You can do this and then tell them to just take it home. Nevada will translate it to the squaw man and his wife."

"It will all be novel enough," mused the new teacher. "I should enjoy it but for the sending of those children home. I would rather be back at my old job as cashier of the water-front restaurant for the particular time that it will take to get those children out of the place."

"Oh, forget it, Eva, you will make me sorry we

sent for you, the first thing you know," said Mrs. Mooring, impatiently. "But you owe it mostly to John anyway. He planned it all before I came. I thought once of changing the arrangement for Ruby. It would have been such valuable experience for her, you know. But Mooring said it would be better to put her in the bank. She likes the work and is doing well at the bank. Besides, things are not going well with us over there; we need to save every cent we can. I have advised Mooring to let a fellow by the name of Stallings out—he is on the coast now on some business for the bank, but is not accomplishing anything. I have advised Mooring not to let him come back. Ruby can fill his place."

* * * * *

School morning came with an unusual bustle. It was new in every way—new teacher, new house, new faces—new everything. Nevada had put Amosa and Grant through the hundredth drill. She wanted them to make a good showing at their father's new school house.

"Now, Grant, don't forget," she warned her young brother. "You do just as I have shown you, and watch Amosa when you forget, and she will straighten you out! Amosa, look after Grant, and you and he must make ideal pupils, and when school is out come straight home."

They were dressed in the new clothes that Nevada had bought for Grant and made for Amosa. Their hands and faces were washed to immaculate cleanliness, and their hair was combed neatly. Amosa wore

a bright red bow that matched her jet black hair. They were in the most presentable condition that their sister's work could make.

Mokava had been despondent for several days. Nevada's overwhelming defeat for the position of teacher was the hardest blow that he had ever experienced. But when he saw Amosa and Grant preparing to go to school—to the building which he had paid for, and watched every piece of material placed in it, to enter the charge of the teacher whom his money had employed—a spark of enthusiasm again lighted his eyes. It had made his faith stronger in Nevada. While she was preparing the children he had been watching her with a pride that knew no bounds. He could depend upon her, at least.

"Cheer up, father," she said, glancing affectionately at Mokava. "If I had known that you planned to enter my name for the position I would not have permitted it. It was out of the question. You did not understand. You have not had enough experience in the new life yet. They did the best thing. It would have never done for me to undertake to fill the place. It would have proved more humiliating to you than it has in the present case. Everything is working out all right."

Nevada did not speak the exact words thus imputed to her, but she spoke their substance, always intermingling the English and Indian tongue in such a manner as to make it the easiest understood by her father. It was different in conversing with her mother. If the latter understood a syllable of any other than

her native tongue she refused at all times to acknowledge it.

School had just been called when Amosa and Grant entered the door. Mokava had accompanied them a part of the way through the enthusiasm which Nevada had aroused in him again. The half-breeds went forward, punctiliously following the instructions given them by Nevada, and presented themselves in front of the teacher.

"My name is Amosa and this is my brother, Grant," began the girl. "We are the children of Mokava."

A burst of laughter spread over the school room. Amosa and Grant looked about at first, thinking they had made a mistake in some way. But after a minute's thought they knew better, for they had followed out the instructions of Nevada, so far, to the dot.

The teacher drew a note from her desk and gave it to Amosa, telling her to take it to her father. The half-breeds stood bewildered for a moment. The teacher motioned with her hand for them to depart. They still did not comprehend. Thinking, however, that she meant for them to be seated, Amosa went to a seat on the side of the house occupied by the girls and directed Grant to a seat among the boys.

The other children now went into an uproar of laughter, despite the efforts of the teacher to secure order. She then went direct to Amosa and told her to go home and take her brother with her, and to give her father the note. Puzzled beyond all understanding, Amosa arose, went and took Grant by the hand

and led him from the room, while the deafening laughter of the other children thundered in their ears.

Amosa and Grant entered the magnificent home of Mokava and ran to Nevada with the note. She opened and read:

"Dear Mr. Mokava: I am sorry to inform you that it is the sense of the patrons of the school that your children should not be enrolled. There is nothing personal in the matter, but it is considered best for the cause of education and the good of the community.—Eva Martin, teacher."

Two days had passed since Nevada read the note to Mokava. He sat despondently in his adobe hut. He had shut the door and refused to look out into the world. He despised everything new. His mind was on the days of old—when he and Tehana and Nevada and Amosa and Grant were out there alone. He was thinking of those days before Nevada had gone away to the Indian school; before she had begun to learn the ways of the white race; before the white tongue had been heard in their family.

He remembered when it began; when the surveyor was stricken sick and brought to his home; the request to take Nevada to the Indian school; her departure; her return with the enthusiasm that inspired him with a new hope; the coming of Ray and Mooring; the rush; the accursed money which he had received; the building of the new house for Nevada; the school building, and the hopes for Nevada—they were all blunders. They were now ostracized because of their Indian

blood. After all, the curse of Tehana's tribe was upon them.

The pitiless decree of the society of the little mining camp was against him and his. Robert Ray had canvassed the matter, but could not get the children reinstated. He secured a following, it is true, but most of these had no children. A large majority of those who had children in school threatened to withdraw them should those of Mokava attend.

"Do they permit negro children in the South to attend the white schools?" asked a southerner.

"There are Indian schools for Indian children on the reservations," suggested others.

"But Mokava built the house and is paying the teacher!" argued Ray. "Besides, his children are half white, well behaved and are kept in as neat condition by their sister as any of the white children."

"We will repay Mokava the money he has expended," suggested some, who had already begun to fall behind in their more urgent legal obligations.

But Ray knew they would not keep this promise, and replied that Mokava would not accept reimbursement.

"He received enough money for his place here to put him on easy street; he can afford to make it a gift—let him send his children to the Indian school where the government will teach them free," retorted John Mooring and his followers.

"It is the cruelty of fate," acknowledged Nevada, when Robert Ray called to explain the hopelessness of changing the minds of the people. "It is right, I sup-

pose, but I am so sorry for father. I have put off disturbing him. But I will go and explain. It will be a difficult matter, though. He had built up such hopes. It has been his life's desire since the first white man came along to bring his family into their world. He could not understand. He thought he was about to reach this great desire. The shock was terrible.

"Father had already beheld us mingling with his race, and saw great possibilities for us, in his mind's eye. But his hopes are blasted. He sees for them only the desert solitudes, where they must spend their lives in ignorance as he has spent his."

"But it is not so bad as that," said Robert Ray, encouragingly. "You are educated as well as the average woman of your age; the children are intelligent; you can help them; they may now have much better advantages than you—your father has money.

"It is base ingratitude, I admit," continued Ray. "But it has been shown before, even in more civilized communities. Why, I heard of an old negro slave who got rich after he was freed and built a church. He gave it to his less fortunate white neighbors and they would not let him worship in the church. And there was Stephen Girard, who founded a school for orphan boys. One of the young men who received a free education at the school and afterwards became wealthy, refused to contribute to a memorial fund for his benefactor, because Girard was not of the same religious belief as the young man.

"This was in the height of civilization. How can we expect very much of a people out here in the des-

ert who are from everywhere, and where the good have not yet been segregated from the bad? Why, in Goldfield I saw men stoning a Chinese restaurant building and mobbing the Chinese proprietor, who had given them meals when they were friendless and hungry.

"Mokava has been badly treated, but it is not time to give up. He is independent, financially."

"I shall go to him and see what I can do," assured Nevada as Robert Ray was leaving.

"It is I—Nevada—father, may I come in?"

"Yes, come in, my daughter," was the reply in a sad voice.

"My father," she began, sitting on his knee and placing her arms about his neck. "You must not give up. It is too late to surrender. I would return to our old times when we were here alone—just you and mother and the children and I, before these people came and we had begun to learn their ways; before we knew of the outside world, except what you told us upon your return from the trading post about once a year. Those were days when our hearts were always filled with joy. We didn't know or care for anything else then. But we have left those days and everything connected with them and we can't go back. We've started on the white man's way and we must follow it. It's too late to turn back."

"No, no, no! It is not too late," replied Mokava. "It is easy. I will pack our old things—the old pot and pans, the tin plates and tin cups and the cans, and the old tepee—on the old wagon and the burros will

draw us back to the spring where Tehana and I first lived. The curse will not disturb us there. We will then be away from these white men. They are thieves and robbers. They have made me rob and steal. They made me take money for the spring and grounds. They did not belong to me—they belonged to all alike. Then they rob others. They sell them the water and the land in small dribs. Then they tell lies about Burro Hill. They sell paper to strangers. They call it stock. It is nice paper. It looks like pictures—like money. But there is nothing—just a few streaks of gold here and there. It is no good.

“And I—I took money for it, Nevada. I am as bad as they. And now I suffer. Your mother knows better. She knows what it will come to. She remembers the old legend of her tribe. It is all because I didn’t pay for my squaw. Let us go away. Let us hurry. I do not want to see the white men any more!”

“No, father, we cannot go back. I have promised to marry Tom Lansing. You gave your consent. You would not break your promise to him; you would not have Amosa and Grant go back. They have gotten a taste of the white man’s way and they would never be contented. There is a place yet for them. The government Indian school will welcome them. The Great White Father does not look for the difference in the color of his children. Their blood is all the same to him. They are broader minded people than those who live at Mokava. You are getting along in years. You do not care for the white man’s ways. You started too late. But Amosa and Grant are young. They

must go on. Mother will make the sacrifice. She despises everything white except you, but she is a true mother just the same. I have talked with her. She has consented. It is all planned. I will leave with Amosa and Grant tomorrow for the Indian school. I will teach them, too. You'll recall that I was offered a position in the Indian school. It is not too late. I will accept."

"But your promise to marry Lansing," reminded Mokava.

"He will have to wait another year—he expects it."

"But the curse of Tehana's tribe! You know it runs that neither Tehana nor I, nor our offspring shall ever prosper!" he insisted.

"Those are just old legends of the red men, like the myths of the white men—just stories, dreams, fancies—just in the mind," explained Nevada.

"But it is proving true," said Mokava.

"No, it's the white man's way that has caused all the trouble," replied Nevada. "Their customs and prejudices are one thing today, another tomorrow and another the next day. But we will have to follow their way. It is too late to turn back."

CHAPTER XV

AN ENTERTAINMENT AND A FIGHT

THE new bungalow of the Moorings was lighted as bright as day. Women in finery and jewelry, and men in full dress danced and drank. It was the first society night in Mokava. Mrs. Annette Mooring had announced in her invitations that it would be in honor of Miss Eva Martin, the new teacher.

But it had other purposes. The first was to put at rest any unrest that had been caused by the expulsion of Mokava's children from the school. Next, Mrs. Annette Mooring desired to show off her new house as well as her knowledge of how social affairs should be conducted. Then her husband's business was in a precarious condition and she wished to draw more customers to his bank. If the bank should fail Mrs. Annette Mooring would have to retire to another long period of obscurity. It was in mining booms only that her light had shone since she met John Mooring.

"We must get these people together and get their deposits into our bank; and to do this we need the influence of Robert Ray, and his individual account as well," had said John Mooring to his wife. "We must all get together—form an exclusive set, you know—and come to a better understanding out here in the desert," said Mrs. Mooring to her guests.

The noise of the merry-makers, along with their antics, had driven Ruby Mooring and Robert Ray in

search of a more quiet place. Neither of these young people felt comfortable in the atmosphere of the house. Wine was flowing, and with it ran rife the latest fads from city society, as Miss Eva Martin sponsored them. The guests had free license and the orgies ran with loose reins.

Ray and Ruby had strolled out into the fresh night air and had finally stopped on the steps of the new school building. Seated there under the irregular glow of the small street light over on the corner they remained in silence for a time. The noise about them sounded hollow, lonesome, out there in the great desert. The whirl of the marble-like balls on the roulette wheels gathered from different directions in the town below, and were wafted up on the night breeze in one harmonious sound. The falling of a billiard cue, the leaping of a ball from the table to the floor from the awkward stroke of an excited or drunken player and the sharp, bitter oaths from losers occasionally broke above the monotonous hum and cut the air like a knife. But above it all came loud and clear the raucous shouts and laughter of the guests at the home of Mrs. Annette Mooring.

"I love the quiet—I do not enjoy the kind of fun those people are having," said Ruby Mooring. "It seems so out of place, so unjust to those who cannot afford the necessities, much less the luxuries of life. Here we are spending hundreds of dollars tonight to entertain those people who do not care for it, when a few months ago mother and I were glad to get ordinary meals—at cheap restaurants, at that! Excuse me

for divulging delicate personal secrets, but that is where we met Miss Martin. She was cashier at a restaurant where we ate and used to help us along. That is why mother and father were so interested in getting the school for her. But it has been this way with us all of the time I have been with them. Father says it is the way of the life of the mining man—up one day and down for a year to make up for it.”

“I hope the prosperity will last this time, especially for your sake, Miss Mooring, but it is all a gamble, and I don’t know yet what kind of a card we are holding,” replied Ray.

“I am aware of the conditions—in a measure,” replied the girl. “I fear that I know too much about affairs for my own personal comfort. Mother is like father. She soon forgets old conditions and spends money like a sailor while it lasts. I can’t forget those dreary days when we didn’t know where our next meal was coming from, and when the thought of getting more clothes was even avoided. I hope you do not consider me indiscreet in speaking so frankly of our affairs, but a woman must have somebody in whom to confide. Mother and father cannot get it out of their heads that I am anything but a child, and I can never get to talk with them in grown-up conversation.

“I know you do not like father,” she continued, after a pause, “and I do not blame you—that is your and his matter—but I know you would not take advantage of anything I tell you in a way to injure him. I am making you my confessor without your consent,

and you know anyway, such communications are privileged."

"You are mistaken," replied Robert Ray. "I have nothing against your father, personally. We don't like the way some people do, and I have not approved many of your father's acts, but he has not hurt me in any way, individually. I am not a wholesale censor of others. We all have enough faults without going around with stones in our pockets to throw at others."

"I am glad you feel that way," said the girl. "I was afraid you would take the defeat of Nevada to heart. Her father built this house expecting her to be the teacher; he is even paying the salary of Miss Martin now. It looks unjust. I was afraid you would never forgive my parents."

"No, no; Nevada understands," explained Ray. "Her father does not. But she will finally bring him around to see the matter right. Nevada is reasonable. She knows that it would not have been the proper thing for her to have taken the school, with the prejudice against her Indian blood. But Mokava is taking it hard. Since Nevada left with the children for the Indian school he has been drinking. I have been a little uneasy, but have, and shall continue, to keep watch on him."

"That is so nice of you—every one speaks so well of you—except—"

"That reminds me!" interrupted Ray. "I have been intending to ask you how you managed things in San Francisco that night, but could never think of it before when we were together. How did you explain?"

"Oh, it was so simple, after all of my alarm," began the girl. "You see he had been drinking for nearly a week. He was to have come with father on this trip at first. He and father had met at the strike in Nome and raked up enough money between them to get out of Alaska. Mother came down with them, you know, and I joined them in San Francisco—I was just from school. They introduced Mr. Brush to me and he immediately seemed to think that he had the right to my society, whether it suited me or not. I do not know what mother and father may have told him. They may have encouraged him. I think he supplied most of the money for them all to get out of Nome. Anyway, he acted as if he thought he owned all of us, especially when he became intoxicated. I evaded him more and more as he became the more intolerable.

"He had taken a room near our suite—the room you rented from me that night. After I had absented myself every time he came, for several days, he went away and began to drink heavily. He sent the key in by father and gave up the room. But that night, after father and mother went out—he must have seen them on the street—well, anyway, he came up and you know the rest!"

"But how did you extricate yourself from the dilemma in which I left you?" asked Ray, concealing the old anger that was aroused at the thought of that night.

"Oh, I was about to forget," she continued. "It appears that a Chinaman in the rear had heard the

noise of your fight and sent up a policeman. Then the policeman went out on the roof and the Chinaman became still more alarmed and turned in the riot call. He was a sort of spy for the officers for that end of town.

"I became alarmed for you while the officer was out on the roof and called him back, promising to tell him everything, but before I had time to invent a story, the riot wagon arrived and the room filled with plain clothes men. I was certain now that you had had time to escape and did not attempt to explain. They rushed out on the roof, but left the policeman with me. Soon we heard a noise in the other room. It was Mr. Brush, and when the policeman broke in his door, Mr. Brush told the funniest story. He said that he had brought a longshoreman to his room with him for something, and that the fellow had struck him from behind with a slung-shot and robbed him.

"The physicians at first thought his skull was fractured and took him to a hospital. But he was out in a few days. He has never mentioned the matter to me, nor I to him. I was so anxious to talk with you on the boat next morning and explain, but could not get a chance, and dropped that package for an excuse, but—"

"That package!" interjected Ray. "It aroused my curiosity again later. When your father and I were lost on the desert, and it looked as though we would perish, he took the package from his pocket and gave it to me, saying: 'Bob, your chances are best. Take

this, and if you survive and I do not, follow the instructions on the back of the package.'

"Well, I took it and guarded it as closely as I guarded my life until your father was brought in from the desert by Mokava, and until he was on the fair road to recovery, when I restored it to him."

"Did you read the instructions on the back?" asked the girl.

"Yes," blushed Ray, guiltily. "I wanted to know what I should be expected to do should he pass away."

"Oh, you men who have no curiosity!" laughed Ruby. "When it is certain that I am dead, open this package and follow the instructions inside—John Mooring," repeated the girl.

"Then you have read it, too!" chided Ray.

"I wanted to know what I should be expected to do should he pass away," replied Ruby. "You see, father always gave the package to my care while he was at home, but when he would start to leave he always asked for it. He has it in the vault at the bank now, but has shown me where it is, should anything happen. Now, we both have been custodians of that mysterious package; isn't it a strange coincidence?" she asked, drawing the light wrap closer about her shoulders.

Robert Ray fixed the wrap more snugly and drew her closer to him.

"Ruby—Miss Mooring," said Ray after a pause, "I have been anxious to tell you something for a long time. Something that—"

"Ru-by!" arose a call from above the din at the Mooring home.

"Yes, we are coming!" shouted Ruby Mooring, impatiently. "Mother is so excitable," she continued as she and Ray rose and hurried toward the house.

"You are a nice pair to run away from the party when the fun was just beginning," scolded Mrs. Mooring as the two entered the house. "Besides, Ruby, Mr. Brush went away very angry. Your conduct was inexplicable to him!"

"I'm sorry, Mother, but I meant no wrong," explained Ruby.

"You never do," replied Mrs. Mooring, "but you are so indiscreet!"

The place was a scene of bacchanalian disorder. Women reclining on men's laps, irrespective of relationship or former acquaintance, and empty bottles, distorted corks and broken glasses were lying about the floor, while discordant songs crossed each other in maudlin voices; and disheveled heads, bleared eyes and exposed limbs accorded with the soiled and disarranged clothing of the guests.

"And yet, the children of these people are too good to associate with the innocent son and daughter of Mokava!" whispered Ruby Mooring to Robert Ray.

As the crowd was dispersing later John Mooring touched the elbow of Robert Ray. He had just arrived after the pursuit of, and a conference with Andy Brush.

"I would like for you to remain a few minutes after the crowd leaves, Bob, if you can spare the time," whispered Mooring with his old time familiarity.

"Certainly," replied Ray, who was holding Ruby Mooring's hand in the good-night grasp.

"And you come along too, Daughter," said Mooring, turning to Ruby.

"Well, if this hasn't been a wild night—how did it all come out, anyway, Eva? What kind of a hit did I make?" asked Mrs. Annette Mooring as soon as she was alone with the teacher. Mooring, Ray and Ruby had gone into the library.

"It has been a success all around, Annette," complimented the teacher. "I was maid at an entertainment on Van Ness avenue before the earthquake, and they didn't have any the better of your stunt."

"But it is a bad example in the home for Ruby," half soliloquized Mrs. Mooring. "And such people as some of them were! Why, that Mrs. Quinn; she was a kept woman at Cripple Creek; and Mrs. Millard. She ran a house in Nome; and Mrs. Shawley; she was a street-walker in Denver. Oh, there was a bunch of them here tonight that I wouldn't look at in olden times. But they copped live men and are making good now. We need their support in our business, you know. My husband is in business and it is the duty of his wife to overlook her social scruples in order to help him out."

"You are right, dear Annette," replied the teacher sadly. "If I had a husband I would go the limit for him."

"Never mind, kid," encouraged Mrs. Mooring. "I will get you a man out here that will be worth while. I have my eye out for you, and among these new millionaire bachelors I will find one that is good as well

as rich, though the two do not often go together," she concluded, as she left the room.

Mrs. Mooring was passing the library door. Her husband and Robert Ray were in deep conversation. Ruby was turning the pages of a book. Mrs. Mooring stopped for a second as if she would enter, and then started on. She saw Robert Ray glance toward her.

"Goodnight, Mr. Ray. I hope you enjoyed yourself, even if you and Ruby did play hookey!" she said.

"Thank you! It has been my first real evening since the camp was established," assured Robert Ray. Then he glanced at Ruby Mooring.

"I am at your service, Jack," continued Ray after a pause, in a lower voice to Mooring. "My account will also be changed to your bank. You say that Stallings is meeting with difficulties at San Francisco?"

"Hush, not so loud!" cautioned Mooring. "My wife is bitter against Stallings for some reason. She has some kind of a woman's hunch that Stallings will never do us any good. She insists that I shall let him out. She cannot bear the idea of the man coming back to Mokava—just some fool notion, you know. But he is a keen one! He has the backing, too. He secured a temporary extension of that big loan and is trying to transfer it to another concern."

"I don't mean to use your money, Bob," continued Mooring assuringly. "The moral support is what I want. The transfer of your account to our bank will show your confidence in Burro Hill. You know it is generally understood that our bank and Burro Hill are about the same thing. Then your coming back will

offset the damage caused by your unloading your Burro Hill holdings—nothing bitter, old boy; bygones are bygones, you know! You see I will tell some of the big ones who were here tonight and they will noise the matter of your coming to our bank among the live ones. It will be getting publicity without using the newspapers, you see. I will give you a letter to Stallings and you and he can work together at the other end of the line—can you get away tomorrow, Bob?”

“Just as well; but, say, Jack,” reserved Robert Ray, “Mokava is taking that school episode pretty hard. He has been drinking some. I have been keeping watch on him to see that they don’t get him to gambling. I shall expect you to look out for him in my absence.”

“Cert, my boy—leave that to me!” assured Mooring. “And don’t forget,” he said, extending his hand, “that old scores are wiped off the board, and that we are now all working together for the good of the town of Mokava! Say, that reminds me, Bob; why not have Mokava bring his account over, too? It would be safe with us—I am a little shaky for my friends who have their funds in the other bank. Those fellows are not quite on to the game.”

“Mokava thinks they are all right,” said Ray, evasively, glancing at Ruby. “I will speak with him, though, before I leave.”

But Ray knew what he would say. He was willing to take a chance with his own funds, for Ruby Mooring’s sake, but he would advise Mokava not to change

his deposit for the present. He would wait, at least, until a further interview with Stallings.

Mooring and Ray had risen to their feet, and Mooring was about to accompany Ray to the door, when Ruby joined. Mooring glanced at his daughter and again extended his hand to Ray.

"Goodnight, Bob, and good luck!" said Mooring, as he left the two together.

"I hope you have enjoyed your evening—but Father always lugs in his business affairs," said Ruby, extending her hand to Ray.

"Our little stroll and our little chat have overshadowed everything else tonight," replied Ray, taking her hand. "And you see the hatchet is buried all around, and you are the little dove of peace!"

"But you are going away?" recalled Ruby.

"Yes, for a short time—by the way, would it be too presumptuous to ask you for a copy of that to take along?" said Ray, pointing to a photograph of Ruby in a silver frame on the table. "To look upon it would be a panacea for such ills as arise when one is away from home, and lonesome."

"That one is mine and you may have it," she replied.

"And send me one of yourself before you leave in the morning," said Ruby, as she wrapped the picture and frame in a paper. "I shall wish to see the face of the father of the town, occasionally—quite often—while he is away!"

"I haven't any here, but if the camera man will take a chance when I reach San Francisco, I will send one,"

he smiled. "And now," began Ray, seriously, "let me finish what I was about to say out yonder tonight. I——"

"Ru-by!" called Mrs. Mooring.

Robert Ray heard her footsteps approaching. He grasped the girl's hand softly, stammered out an awkward goodnight and hastened out of the room and down the steps.

On his way home Robert Ray was informed by a friend on the streets that Mokava was still up and was drinking at Andy Brush's place. He went to the saloon and found the settler leaning against the bar in an intoxicated condition.

"Come with me," said Ray kindly, taking his friend by the hand.

"What did it cost you to get in on this?" asked Andy Brush, insultingly, who had seen Ray enter the place, and was approaching him.

"Just a short walk—that's all," replied Ray, angrily.

"You are taking a little too much on yourself, as usual, Mr. Buttinsky!" growled Brush, shoving Ray and Mokava toward the door.

As quick as a flash Ray struck Brush under the chin and he would have gone to the floor, but that he was caught by one of his employes.

"Release me and let me get at the young scoundrel!" shouted Brush.

Ray, who was about to leave the room, turned.

"Come and fight me just as if you were a man!" demanded Brush.

The two men were still in their dress suits. It was

the first time society had made such demands in the camp. Brush gave his hat to a bystander and removed his coat.

"You shall have fair play in here—not a man shall interfere!" challenged Brush.

Mokava had staggered over against the end of the bar and had turned and was looking at Ray. The latter glanced about him. The eyes of all of the men were upon him. Ray recognized many friends in the crowd. They gave him encouraging glances. Ray was not afraid. He had never known the meaning of that word. But he did not want to fight. It would be noised about as a saloon brawl. They would bring Ruby Mooring's name into it some way, he feared. He was about to turn for Mokava and leave the place.

"Dirty coward!" Brush scowled.

Ray turned like a flash. His hat and coat were in the hands of the now awakened Mokava in an instant.

Andy Brush smiled contemptuously. He looked like a giant stripped for action against his lighter foe.

"Come on!" said Ray in a firm, low voice. The gray in his eyes had taken on a more piercing hue. The molten steel was behind them. The old sparks began to flash.

Brush started toward his antagonist.

Ray crouched to receive him.

"Aha!" ejaculated the big fellow. "I have always suspected you—I know you now! I was drunk then. I am sober now. I was afraid I would never get a chance at you again, you wharf rat!"

But Brush changed his tactics. He had recognized

that peculiar crouch of Ray's. It had been the first time that Andy Brush had ever gone down before a man with bare hands. He had never been able to account for it except that he was drunk. He could not believe that any man, bare-handed, could bring him to the floor. Brush squared himself for the defensive.

"Come on!" he said.

Before the words were off his lips they were smothered with a blow. Ray had leaped like a catamount, struck the man as if to irritate him more than to hurt him, and was again crouched to receive him.

The crowd laughed. There are no friends in a mining camp when a fair fight is in progress.

Andy Brush came at Robert Ray with all of his weight behind his big right fist. He acted as if he would hurl Ray back and down by sheer force. Ray darted to one side when Brush was within an inch of him and struck the big fellow again on the mouth.

With an oath he turned at Ray again. But Ray met him this time, ducked and landed his right hand on Brush's cheek. It was easy to see that in skill Brush was no antagonist for the young man. But his powerful physique and determination were no mean assets.

He now rushed upon Ray in a clinch. He held the young man's head in the curve of his left arm and began pounding him with his right in the ribs, stomach—wherever he could get in a blow. The crowd started to interfere, but like a flash, so bewilderingly quick that no one knew how it was done, Ray released himself, and at the same time sent blow after blow to the same point on the big fellow's jaw, even while

Brush was falling, until he hit the floor with a thud that shook the whole house.

Ray waited a moment, but the big fellow did not rise. While Brush's employes were engaged in reviving him, Ray put on his coat and hat and led Mokava out, followed by the admiring eyes of the crowd.

Robert Ray took the settler to his home. On his way he informed Mokava of his contemplated trip the following day, and cautioned the squaw man to desist from drinking. He also told him to let his money remain where it was. The excitement and the night air had brought Mokava to his senses.

"I expect to visit Nevada while I am away," emphasized Ray. "I will not tell her, but what would she do if she should learn that her father has been drinking?"

"Me quit—me no drink no more!" promised the settler.

When they reached the door Ray again reminded Mokava about his money, and to remain sober. Mokava entered the adobe in silence. Ray heard Tehana's voice. It was in a higher pitch than he ever heard it before. She mentioned the name of Andy Brush. There was no Indian word for that. But Ray heard her couple it with "coyote." He half-way agreed to the simile.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLEECING OF MOKAVA

ROBERT RAY left on the morning train for the coast. He was not thoroughly satisfied with his act of turning over his account to Mooring. The good he had discovered in the character of Ruby Mooring had not changed his opinion of her father. Yet he knew that Stallings had some personal motive in view. His advice had been based on some grievance to himself.

On the moment of deciding to return his deposit to Mooring Ray took into consideration his early meeting with Stallings and a further interview on the subject of Mooring's financial stability. As a subterfuge to make it appear to Mooring that he had full confidence in the latter's good intentions, he asked Mooring to look after Mokava in his absence.

But he had gone immediately to Mokava and appealed to him personally to abstain from drink. He knew that if the memory of Nevada's confidence in him would not restrain him nothing else would. But he thought that it would. In any event he was determined to ascertain from Stallings as soon as possible the motive behind the latter's suggestion about the withdrawal of the deposits from Mooring's bank.

Mooring and Brush had met at the bank shortly after Robert Ray had taken the train. Mooring had paused in his explanation. He was sitting at his desk

and Brush was waiting for him to resume. Mooring picked up a pen and drew a large circle at the bottom of a sheet of paper which was lying on the desk. He then drew a very small circle at the top of the sheet. Then he drew a small, straight line connecting the two circles.

"That is our position, Andy," he said, pointing to the small circle. "We will call ourselves the little circle. It is a reservoir. The big circle is the outside world. It is the source of supply. The long mark is the connecting pipe—it is the railroad. Now we will plug the pipe just outside the big circle. That is the position of the town of Mokava in the way of resources. I mean money.

"Results," continued Mooring, after a pause. "When we have exhausted what is in the little circle—what money we now have in Mokava—we are through. Our stocks have quit selling—and that is all we have to sell. The men who are delving beneath the surface on Burro Hill have found nothing to ship. As I said before, when we have exhausted what cash we have in the town of Mokava we will be the worst busted community on the map."

"That is evident," replied Brush, "but what are you going to do?"

"Die game, as the coarser class of highwaymen would say," smiled Mooring.

"Let that be the slogan of others, but let us corral some of this stuff in the small circle before it all leaks out, and store it away for individual use while the

other is being absorbed by the community at large," suggested Brush.

"That's exactly what I am driving at," explained Mooring. "We have a better chance right now than we will ever have again. I want your steady hand to get a grip on a good portion of it, and it must be done at once!"

"What about your own paw?" inquired Brush.

"I'm coming to that now. I have sent Bob Ray to help Stallings——"

"Two dead sticks!" interrupted Brush, raising his hand to his bruised face.

"But wait," said Mooring, impatiently. "That is all a part of the game. I got Ray to change his bank account to this bank before he left, but that's just an item. Stallings and he will get another extension on that San Francisco loan; and when you get in your work we will be ready to fail at any moment."

"My work? You haven't named it yet," inquired Brush, continuing: "You said that fellow Stallings was going to start things this way—open the flood-gates from the big circle and overflow the little circle, drown it out, as I understood it—but the current or stream was cut off as soon as he got down there and a small draft has been exhausting our supply by slow degrees ever since."

"Ray's deposit has filled the vacuum in our part of the circle," smiled Mooring, "and you will soon have enough in the private storage to fix us for a season, at least!"

"But what is the game?" insisted Brush.

"The squaw man," replied Mooring.

"He's on a drunk—been drunk ever since Ray left camp; started as soon as his kids left for the Indian school," explained Brush. "Why, his old squaw led him home by the ear last night after cleaning out Jake's place—I'd like to see her raise a rough house in my place!"

"Now you are getting at the point," smiled Mooring. "I knew all you have told. I sent Ray away as a part of the whole plan. I could have gotten his account without that—he fell easy. He was at the entertainment, stuck on Ruby, you know! But that is neither here nor there. I want the squaw man's account transferred to this bank—not in his name, either, but to our private account. I want it in our little individual storage department, since we have used that term as descriptive of our personal holdings."

"It is easy to plan," philosophized Brush.

"Easier to execute in this case. Go down to the adobe in your auto; tell old Mokava that you want to take him out for a ride; drive him around for awhile and boost for Nevada. Tell him about her intelligence and education—leave off the beauty gag; he'll think you are stuck on her and that would queer the game. Then take him to our place. Have the boys posted and get him to play a few sociable whirls at roulette. Put in with him and have the croupier pay whether you win or lose. Divide up the winnings. Let the drinks flow freely. Then suggest that you and him try your luck alone, and you'll drop out when he gets started—oh, what do I mean, telling you about your own business?

You've fleeced hundreds. The squaw man will fall easy! But don't forget the drinks and the old squaw! Keep plenty of the drinks at his elbow and have the boys throw the old woman out if she bothers."

"What about Ruby?" asked Brush, after he had consented to the plan to fleece the settler.

"Oh, you ought to manage that—you have a clear field, now that Ray's out of the way!"

"I can manage some men, and some classes of women," continued Brush, hesitatingly, "but that girl of yours is different from others; she has a head of her own—takes after her mother, in some ways. Every time I've broached—even gotten ready to broach the subject, she switched the conversation, got away, or threw me off the track. I believe she is hopelessly in love with Traitor—Ruffian Ray!"

"Easy Ray," corrected Mooring.

Andy Brush's hand again went to his face. This time he felt tenderly about the lower part of his left jaw.

"Wife and I," continued the banker, "tried soft-soaping and baiting at the same time—invited him over, left him and Ruby alone together—and it won! Why don't you try similar plans on Ruby? Try cooing words and a flash of your bank-book! All women are more or less susceptible to flattering words and bank-rolls," said Mooring, nudging Brush gently in the side.

"She won't give me a chance—you saw her duck with Bob Ray last night? That fellow and I had a little tilt later on, but next time it will be a funeral for one or

the other of us!" Brush's hand again went to a sore spot on his face.

"Oh, attend to Ray as you like, but leave Ruby to Mrs. Mooring and I, if you have too faint a heart to win a fair lady. Each of us generally gets what he starts after, and when we both put our shoulders to the same wheel, it has to move—leave it to her mother and I," encouraged Mooring, as Brush left the place.

* * * * *

Half the gamblers in camp had gathered at the Big Casino, the place owned by Mooring and Brush, but which was run by Brush. The news had spread that Mokava had gone home and kissed his squaw wife for luck and had returned to break the Big Casino gambling house.

"And you never heard of such luck in the biggest day of the Klondike!" declared an old-time gambler from the north. "That squaw man is mad. He has relieved the roulette wheel of three bank rolls in regular order already, and the games all over town have stopped so that the dealers may go over and see the old squaw man rake down the coin," ran the report.

And it was not far wrong. Mokava was having one of those runs of luck that frequently happens to the novice, which makes the proprietors of gambling houses tremble while it lasts. Banker Mooring had come down himself to watch the game.

Whether he played the numbers straight up or double, or on the corners, they came his way. Then he switched to the black, the ball followed; when he turned to the red it bounded over into a corresponding

color. Then he would throw a pile of chips on the double and single in the green and the ball yielded to his spell.

Drinks were brought, but they stood in rows on the trays while Mokava's busy hand drew in his winnings. It required call after call by the waiter before he would stop to take a drink. He was luck-mad. The oldest gamblers could not recall such a run of luck in all of their experience. The settler stood with clenched teeth and eager eyes, oblivious to everything but the game which he was playing.

"He is the master of the god of luck," whispered an old gambler as the crowd gathered about him with a sort of awe.

There was no chance to cheat the winner. He was surrounded by competitors from the other gambling houses. They would have liked to see the Big Casino forced to close its doors. A dozen men, gray in the cause, kept close mental account of Mokava's playing. Had the dealer withheld one chip a storm would have been raised. There is a certain atmosphere about a winner that always protects him in a public game. It is the code of gambling. The cut-throat who would lay in wait for him outside and take his last cent would fight for his protection while at the game and winning. It is stronger than the code of honor among thieves.

"Say, you have gotten us into a pretty mess!" remarked Brush to Mooring. "That old fool will have the contents of your little circle in his pockets in a few

more hours, and I believe he would finally get the contents of your big circle if he had connection with it!"

"Get him drunk! Get him drunk!" whispered Mooring.

"Can't do it. He is luck-mad," replied Brush. "Whiskey don't phase him any more than that much water!"

"He's winning Bob Ray's money now," said Mooring. "I'll have to get into the vault and tap the current funds if he keeps this up."

"Let's get out of here—we're Jonahs!" said Brush. "Say, Dick," he called to the house manager, "Mooring and I are going over to the bank where we will be handy to the rest of the bank-roll. We will be in the private office. Send over to the Little Monte Carlo and get that hunchback croupier—get him at any price—and have him try his luck against the squaw man. When the cash gets low again send over to the bank. We'll wait there until he gets it all. Rap three times on the door—oh, it's midnight now. We won't have to wait till day. He'll have it all by four o'clock!"

Daylight came and Mokava was still at the wheel. Tehana had tried several times to rescue him, but the men drove her back. One finally placed the muzzle of a revolver in her face and told her he would shoot the next time she disturbed the place. The account showed that Mokava had been see-sawing with the wheel for several hours at sunrise.

If there was any difference it was against the settler.

The croupiers had been changed every thirty minutes during the latter part of the night. When the

hunchback tired, another, supposed to possess some special charm against the winner, was brought forward. There was a demand for the men who were generally barred from behind the wheels on account of their special deformities, which were regarded as impenetrable shields against the arrows of the god of luck, but Mokava had broken all records. One after another had lost to the settler and left the stand in deep humiliation. All the early hours of the morning the settler had stood a menace to the fortune of Mooring and Brush.

At noon Mokava was still playing, his eyes half-closed and his body in a tottering condition. But he handled the checks with a mechanical correctness that was astonishing. Mokava had sent to his bank for a statement of his account. A clerk from the bank sat near. He was keeping the score of Mokava's winnings and losses.

A turn had come in the squaw man's luck. The god of games had gradually left him. He had given him many chances to quit in the lead, but the fascination to keep on had overridden the judgment of Mokava, if he possessed any during the game. He had reached a point in his winnings several times that, had he stopped, would have left Mooring and Brush bankrupts. But the change in his luck was so gradual at first that he hardly perceived it. Then the down hill glide became more rapid.

"Now bring me whiskey!" he demanded.

The order was filled and repeated, but it seemed only to aid the vehicle that was fast running away with his

bank account. The crowd gathered closer and the squaw man played with steadier nerves, but the wheel was against him. Loss after loss followed.

Mokava was nearing the end of his account. The bank clerk had notified him. But he played the more recklessly. He thought his luck would return. But alas for such a hope! Hundreds of thousands had hoped before Mokava.

"That's your last dollar," spoke the bank clerk.

Mokava played it as cheerfully as he had played the first—and lost!

"Now, I'll give you another chance," said Brush, who had returned and had been watching the finish. "I'll flop you the dice once; this against your new house and everything in it!"

He hurriedly counted out fifty thousand dollars and stacked it up before Mokava.

The settler stood silent for a full minute. He was weighing his chances to win. But what did he care for the house now? All of his hopes upon which that house was built were gone.

"I take you up!" replied the settler.

Brush shook the dice-box and rolled the cubes out on the table. Three treys showed their faces.

It was a poor throw when so much was at stake. The crowd had to be shoved back by the attendants.

Mokava took up the box. There was a silence that was awful. The breathing of men even sounded loud. The fascinating spell of chance hung over the crowd.

Mokava began to shake the box with unsteady hand. He rolled the dice out upon the table. Two sixes showed on the faces of the dice and another trembled while the dice poised and balanced on its edge for a tenth of a second. Then the six lay over on the side!

Mokava had lost!

CHAPTER XVII

STALLINGS AND RAY RECEIVE LETTERS

“I wish to be frank with you and want you to be equally fair with me,” said Robert Ray upon meeting Horatio Stallings. “I am not particularly suspicious of you, but when a man admits that he has personal motives against his employer’s interest, there is such an inconsistency with honesty in remaining in his employ that I cannot reconcile your situation.”

“I told you that I would protect you, did I not?” replied Stallings.

“Yes, but I am too much in the dark to take the word of a man who is practically a stranger to me, even against that of a man whom I know to be a scoundrel.”

“And you have returned your bank account to Mooring’s keeping?” asked Stallings.

“Yes, temporarily—until I could talk with you further.”

“I am not ready to disclose anything further than I have already assured you,” explained Stallings. “I have carried out my plans as I intended. I have worked to keep my employer going, but I have kept a look out to see that he does not wrong any one else. If he must fail, he must be the loser; and, his failure seems inevitable.”

“But you are safe yet,” continued Stallings, after a

long pause. "I am not going to explain now, but it will all come out in time. There is plenty of time for you. I will let you know. When I tell you, then you must withdraw your account with all haste. I assure you, upon what honor that I may have left, that I will protect you, and that I will protect John Mooring, so long as I see a chance of doing so without permitting him to wrong—rob others."

Ray decided to continue the work with Stallings, but to watch and study the man. He was both frank and obscure in his admissions, and unrelenting, but Ray could not resist a certain confidence in him.

One of the first things that Robert Ray sought was a photograph gallery. He studied the work in a dozen display windows before he selected a photographer. Then he looked into a mirror and shook his head, doubtfully. The tan of the desert was deep and he was conscious of that awkwardness that one often feels after returning from the easy companionship of friendly nature to the haughty stare of an exacting civilization. He wondered if any artist could make a reproduction of him that would not look coarse in the eyes of Ruby Mooring.

But he had promised and he took a chance. He hurried the picture off by the first mail for fear he should not have the courage to send it if he delayed.

He frequently went to the neighborhood of the water-front rooming house where he had first met and fought for Ruby Mooring. He loved to linger about the place where he had first looked into her gentle eyes and heard her soft, sweet voice. Then he took trips across

the bay on the same ferry-boat in which they had crossed. He occupied the same seat that he had occupied when he saw her that morning gazing into space, blushing with the consciousness that he was watching her, and still anxious to convey to him the condition of Andy Brush! Then when the boat would whistle for the landing on the Oakland side he would imagine that she was passing him with the rush of passengers, and he would rush for the gangplank and pursue her imaginary form behind the crowds, and continue out to the same place where she had stood when he picked up the package and later entered the train.

It was all silly, even to Robert Ray, but he excused himself on the ground that there was not much else to do, and that he had to put in the time in some way. Stallings had done about all that could be done for the cause which they both represented, and Ray's presence was practically useless, anyway. But he needed the trip and the rest it gave him from the glare of the desert sun—and he had gathered the courage to go and have it out with Ruby Mooring immediately on his return. He had gained something by the trip, anyway.

"I don't see how we can do anything more," said Robert Ray a few days later in a very home-sick tone. "The bottom seems to have fallen out of the town of Mokava, and everybody in the outside world seems to know it. It is strange that the people at home do not realize it. The old saying that one has to go away from home to learn the truth applies in this case. Our people at home are not even aware of the fact that

things are slipping. They think good times will last forever."

Ray and Stallings were seated in Ray's room at the hotel. They had exhausted their mental resources in planning and their patience as well, and the patience of those whom they had been trying to further interest in stocks and lots in the town of Mokava. The banking institution which held the securities of Mooring and Brush had become impatient and announced that they would foreclose when the notes became due.

"It has been a hard fight ever since I came to keep those fellows off of the bank at Mokava," explained Stallings. "And raising money, except in dribs, is out of the question. It will require deep mining to demonstrate whether or not there is anything behind or under the place, and that takes money. If they had put the money in deep prospecting instead of spending it in fast living and gambling as fast as they received it from the sale of stocks, they would have been in better condition. They might have been broke, as they are now, but they would have known whether or not they have anything to tie to. As it is, they do not know that they are broke, and have nothing to show for their money."

A knock came at the door and a porter entered with mail for the two men. Stallings received a letter and Ray received two. Ray recognized the hand-writing of both Miss Ruby Mooring and her father. He opened the letter from the young woman first, and read to himself:

"Dear Mr. Ray:—So much has happened since you

left that I hardly know where to begin. I received the photograph in good condition. It is fine—just like you! Wonder when I shall see the original again? I hope you are succeeding. Conditions are in bad shape here and getting worse every day. People are beginning to leave on the quiet. Not one of them admits going away permanently. They give all kinds of excuses. One is going on business, another to visit relatives, others to get to the sea-shore and cool off—it is still very warm. They all say they will not be gone long, but the truth is, they are selling out quietly, when they can, and every one is withdrawing his deposits from the bank!

“But I forgot to tell you about poor old Mokava! They took advantage of him while he was drinking and induced him to gamble. He lost every cent and then gambled away his home. And they made him vacate the very next day. He and Tehana are now living in their teepee just outside of town. They offered to let Mokava use a lot near the gulch, but he refused to accept anything in the town limits, and had Tehana pitch the teepee on unclaimed ground.

“I do not think they will stay long, however, as Tehana wants to go back to some place across the desert where they lived in earlier days. But Mokava is holding back until you come. He does not want to go away until he sees you.

“But the saddest of all is the desecration of the new house of Mokava. They have turned his place into a terrible resort. Mr. Brush moved his gambling apparatus, outfit, or whatever you call it, over there,

and they call the place the 'Casino Annex.' They use the main room for gambling and drinking, I am informed, and pardon me, but they say that the low class of women of the town occupy the other rooms in the house. I think——"

Robert Ray stopped reading and was walking the floor excitedly.

"I'm let out," laughed Stallings. "Mooring says that business is falling off so rapidly that he will have to cut down expenses and will keep you only in the field. He explains that his daughter can do all the bookkeeping that is needed and that I need not return. I guess he is about right. He instructs me to turn over everything to you. You know about everything concerning the situation, so that with the papers, which I will get from my room, we can close matters at once. And, now, I would again advise you to withdraw your deposit."

Returning to his room, Stallings re-read the following extract from Mooring's letter and smiled:

"As I said in the outset, we must cut down expenses, and for that reason you may turn over your papers and what information you have to Bob Ray. Your services have been perfectly satisfactory. You may draw on the bank for whatever may be coming to you."

Mooring's letter to Robert Ray was more lengthy. He stated that the bank was all right at home; that the money in the camp generally was coming over to him; that it was better with them than it had ever been before.

"Take over Stallings' papers," it ran. "I have let

him out. You will be able to handle matters alone, and that will cut down expenses. Extend that claim as long and as often as you can. In the meantime we will get matters in shape here so that we can meet it when it has to be paid. Stay in the field and use your judgment."

"Yes, I will stay in the field—in my mind!" muttered Ray. "I will be in the town of Mokava as quickly as the slow desert train will take me, after I have visited Nevada—poor Mokava! As innocent as a child, and yet those men have robbed him and turned him into the desert."

"Yes, I will stay in the field, but it will be in the field in and about the town of Mokava until the settler gets justice!"

"I forgot to tell you," continued Mooring's letter. "We are having a little trouble through some mysterious letters being sent out and signed 'Flunkey.' You remember that tramp we met at the railroad camp the day we closed the deal for terminal grounds? You remember he was an assistant cook, and they had a little fun at his expense. He seems to be trying to take his spite out on me. And he is succeeding very well. They say he left the railroad camp the same night after we left and has not been heard from since—until this wholesale letter writing began."

"In some strange manner he has learned a lot about our affairs, and knows a large number of our depositors. He states in his letters that he worked in the bank as a janitor and has inside information about it. He tells them to watch out for his second letter. In

that letter he says they will find some reliable information and good advice. He has many of our old depositors suspicious and it keeps us busy explaining. I don't understand the matter at all. We did have a janitor for a short time. But he did not resemble this man Flunkey. He possessed but little intelligence, besides, while the real Flunkey was said to have been a man of extraordinarily active brain, when he left liquor alone. He must now be on the water-wagon, for he is certainly using his brain intelligently, even if he is using it in the wrong way.

"But we will be able to control the matter. We are sending out letters telling the people who he is. We do not expect much further trouble from that source. Good luck to you!"

"I'm going back," announced Ray to Stallings as the latter re-entered.

"I understood from Mr. Mooring's letter to me that you would remain here and plug for the town of Mokava," replied Stallings.

"I am going back and plug for the man, Mokava," replied Ray, facetiously. "Things are going to the devil in a hurry out there. A fellow by the name of Flunkey is adding fuel to the flame by sending out warning letters to depositors of the bank. He was an employe of the railroad construction people and is sore at Mooring for some reason. We met him at a dinner before the railroad reached Mokava. He was a cook, or assistant to the cook of the company."

Then Ray told Stallings as much as he thought was proper about the treatment of the settler.

"Did Mooring write you this about the squaw man?" asked Stallings with surprise.

"No, his daughter wrote me; that girl is all right!" boasted Ray, as he began to pack his belongings.

"Here are Mooring's papers," said Stallings, handing a large bundle over to Robert Ray. "I will go over them with you when you are ready."

"No, it is not necessary; I've not the time to spare," replied Ray.

Robert Ray was wrapping a soft cloth about a frame containing the picture of Ruby Mooring before placing it in his suit-case.

"I beg your pardon, but will you permit me to look at that photograph once more before you put it away?" asked Stallings.

"Mr. Stallings, you will have me jealous if you do not show less interest in that girl," laughed Ray, handing the picture to his friend. "You are getting to admire her almost as much as I. You never fail to ask questions about her every time you see her picture; and since I told you about her your interest has increased. Now you are gazing at her as if she were yours and no one else, not even the owner of that photograph had any right to even admire her. If it wasn't for your age I'd fear you as a rival."

"I ask your pardon," apologized Stallings, sadly, as he handed the picture back slowly, a tear stealing into his eyes. "This lonely life causes me to do peculiar things—creates strange sentiments. I have drifted about the world so long and experienced so much that was bad, and have seen so much treachery on the part

of some women, that the face of a pure, innocent woman appeals to me—touches my heart. They are so much fewer in these days than they were when I was your age, my boy, that it does me good to hear of such girls as she looks to be, and that you say she is. I once had—but, excuse my sentiment! You will be off right away, will you?”

“Yes; I will go by the Indian school and see Nevada—but then comes the problem,” paused Ray. “Would you tell her of all that has happened to her father, or just tell her of the best of the worst and let her find out the remainder later on?”

“Tell it all to her, by all means,” advised Stallings. “She will the quicker get over it. Besides, there should be no secrets held from a daughter about her father. Husband and wife may become estranged—either may betray the other—but a daughter is always the friend of her father. She will never desert the father any more than a true son would turn his back on his mother. Tell her everything. But break it to her discreetly. Prepare the way. From what you have told me she must be a sensible girl, Indian blood or no Indian blood!”

“Yes, she is—and the prettiest girl in the world!” said Ray, absentmindedly, as he gave Ruby Mooring’s picture a better place in his grip.

Stallings looked up and saw which girl Ray referred to in the latter portion of his speech and smiled.

An hour later, with grip in hand, Robert Ray extended his hand to his friend.

“I hope we may meet again, Mr. Stallings, and I

thank you for the many kindnesses you have shown me," said Ray. "I shall do what you advise about my account, but I hope you may relinquish your fight against the father of that dear girl—for her sake!"

"As to meeting again," replied Stallings, grasping Ray's hand cordially, "we shall doubtless do so. You know the world is getting smaller every day—especially to mining men, who seldom ever have a fixed habitation for any length of time. As to the girl and her father, I should always keep such a girl in mind in any kind of a fight!"

Horatio Stallings sat in deep meditation for a long time after Robert Ray left him. Finally he turned to an old valise which he had brought from a closet in the room, and opened it. A dingy, worn suit of clothes occupied a compartment in the old grip, while a large pack of stamped and addressed letters occupied another. He took up the old suit of clothing and a soiled slouch hat. The two matched each other in wear and blemish. He examined them closely and approvingly as they lay on his lap, relapsing into a meditative mood again.

Finally he awoke with a start, looking about the room wildly for a moment and then down at the soiled apparel on his lap. His face broke into a meaningless smile and he folded the suit carefully and placed it and the hat back in the suit-case. Then he took up the stamped and addressed letters, checked up each name studiously, and went out and dropped them in a mail box.

CHAPTER XVIII

RAY BREAKS BAD NEWS AND RECEIVES WORSE

WHEN Robert Ray reached the Indian school he found Nevada in a perturbed state of mind already. He suspected that she had heard the news of her father's misfortune and felt relieved to some extent under the prospect that he would not be first to break it to her.

After the formal greeting and the usual questions that friends ask when they meet, Ray waited for Nevada to divulge the cause of her agitation. But she returned, instead, to her characteristic silence and he began to probe.

"Is everything going right with you?" he asked, sympathetically.

"No, it is a condition of uncertainties," she replied.

"What is the most uncertain part of the condition?" he asked, smiling at what appeared to be a new school phrase.

"All of it—everything is either gone wrong, or shrouded in mystery," she replied. "I am glad you came, Mr. Ray—though your visit is not a surprise. You seem always to appear on the scene in time to aid the Mokava family, or some member of it."

"But I failed to be at home at the proper time to prevent the last catastrophe!" interjected Ray.

"What catastrophe—what do you mean?" inquired Nevada with a puzzled look.

Then she had not heard of her father's predicament. He would have to break the news, after all.

"I have been away several weeks, you know," began Ray.

"Yes, I knew you were in San Francisco, but I have heard of nothing that could be called a disaster to our family," replied Nevada.

"It may not be so bad as I have suggested," parried Ray. "You say that much has gone wrong. I have been away from home until it seems like a century. Let us compare notes—what is worrying you most?"

"Well, among the least of my worries is a mean letter from Mr. Lansing," she began. "He has become impatient about my teaching, and thinks he will have me quit. He says he will visit this place in a day or so and will insist that I give up the position. He will be wasting his time, for I shall not resign—yet!"

"There are many good reasons for my stand in the matter," she continued after a pause, "and the most important one is the welfare of the children. It would not be the proper thing for me to leave them here, especially Grant. He needs my constant influence. I admit my general insignificance, but, strange to say, I am able to restrain my brother to a great extent.

"But I have a dread for his future. He is very perplexing. He has begun to show his real nature here. The association of the children of the various tribes has aroused all kinds of foolish notions in

Grant's head. He has so changed in disposition that one would hardly realize that he is the same boy. He has brooded over the treatment in that school matter at home until he imagines that he is greatly prejudiced against the white race. His associates have aided in magnifying his wrongs, real and imaginary. I can now understand why the uprisings among the Indians when they ought to have known that they had no chance against the government. Some of them would go against the government today and sacrifice their lives, hopelessly, if they had only a leader."

"Then she has not yet heard anything about her father and mother being homeless—this is certain," meditated Ray. "I might as well tell her about it and have it over."

"Nevada—Miss Nevada," he said nervously, "I had hoped that you had heard worse news than you have been telling me."

"Is there worse?" she asked, her face assuming the stoicism of her mother, and every trace of worry leaving it.

"Yes!" replied Ray, sadly.

"I might have known it—the old tribal legend, you know!" she smiled lightly. But there was no mirth behind the smile. It was an expression of defiance, such as the forefathers of her mother would have returned when informed by their captors that the stake had been driven and the fagots were ready for the torture.

"Go on and do your worst, as the heroine tells the

villain in some of the novels that have reached the school," suggested Nevada, after some delay.

Robert Ray began to relate the story by evading the harsher details, and attempting to conceal the permanent loss of the home and its furnishings, and their abandonment for the old teepee out in the strip of desert adjoining the town plot. But as he proceeded he noticed that the more he stripped the story to its cruel barrenness the firmer and more resigned became the expression on Nevada's face. Then without further attempt at concealment he finished the story as it had come to him in Ruby Mooring's letter.

"Poor Father, I must hurry to him and comfort him!" she said in a calm voice, when Ray had finished. Then turning to him, she continued: "You are returning, may I not accompany you?"

"Yes, I am returning tonight, but you said Lansing——"

"That doesn't make any difference!" she interrupted, looking at Ray with an anxious expression in her eyes. But she did not detect what she momentarily hoped. "It is family—Father first, Mr. Ray," she continued, watching Ray's eyes as if she would read his soul through them. "Mr. Lansing is kind, he has been a friend of—to me. So that you may not think me ungrateful I might repeat the story: He was with a geological surveying party of the government that was establishing the altitude of various points in the Death Valley country. He was stricken with fever and was brought to our house; he suggested my education at the government Indian school.

He has been per—attentive since. I am thankful to him, very much so, but—Father first! The excuse to leave before Mr. Lansing arrives is a good one.”

She saw nothing in Robert Ray’s face but deep meditation. He looked as though he had not heard her—that his mind was far away from the Indian school and those about him.

“But I fear there will be no way to restrain Grant from an attempt at revenge when he learns of the predicament of Father and Mother,” she continued.

“We will keep it from him until we get matters in better shape,” awoke Ray from his reverie. “We’ll tell him that you are going home for a visit, and that he must look after Amosa during your absence—put him on his own responsibility; that is the best way to control mankind of every type.”

“I know,” said Nevada, “but Grant will find out the truth, sooner or later, and then he will feel that his duty to avenge the wrongs done us all is greater than his duty to stay here and look after Amosa. He knows that she will receive the best of care here, anyway. He is certain to find out. The old Indian telegraphy is still in use. I do not understand it, but the children here learn things quickly in some way. Why, Grant tells me things about what is going on at home long before I see them in the newspapers. He knew that you had gone to San Francisco and was going to visit the Indian school. It is rather strange that he has not already learned and told me what you have about Mother and Father.”

“I should think the home papers would be ashamed

to publish the facts about your father's misfortune," said Ray. "If they do not publish it before we reach home I shall use my influence to prevent publicity."

"But they publish so many things they should not publish—that reminds me," said Nevada, stopping suddenly and bringing a blurred copy of one of the home papers from a side-room. "I am surprised at Ruby Mooring," she continued, hunting for a particular article in the paper. "I thought she would have done better in marriage—she was such a sensible girl!"

"What—what do you mean?" gasped Robert Ray.

"Don't you know?" asked Nevada, innocently. "Oh, that's true, you have been away from home and this paper just came this morning!"

Nevada found the place for which she was looking and gave the paper to Ray, pointing out the article to which she had referred. Ray grabbed the paper, almost rudely, from her hands and began to read, to himself:

"IMPORTANT SOCIAL EVENT

"WEALTHY SOCIETY GIRL TO WED CAPITALIST

"The editor of this paper takes pleasure in announcing the most important event affecting the society of this city that has yet occurred. It was the universal popularity of this paper that gave the editor this exclusive announcement as a complete scoop on all competitors.

"It was done in such a quiet manner, too. Last evening, when the editor was puzzling his brain for a story that would please the large horde of readers of

this paper when it came out this morning, the genial face of Banker John Mooring modestly beamed on our sanctum.

“‘Can you come to dinner with me—just a private home dinner, you know?’ he asked the editor in that whole-souled manner, so characteristic with Mr. Mooring, and which no scribe would refuse.

“Well, we went!

“Mrs. Annette Mooring needs no introduction here as a hostess. The people of this prosperous city have long since learned that she does things in a social and entertaining way on a broad and up-to-date style.

“That dinner!

“This scribe has done society on the largest newspapers in the various cities of the country in his day, and was never criticised for failing to meet the occasion. But this is one time in his life, when as editor of his own sheet, he refuses to attempt to describe the substantials and delicacies that fairly made the table groan under their precious weight!

“Banker Mooring had truthfully said it was a private affair, but he had wilfully misled the editor about the gorgeousness of the sumptuous repast. He had said it was an ordinary family dinner!

“If the Moorings have such dinners every day this scribe begs to be excused from boarding at their home—he does not wish to fill a premature grave from over-eating!

“But it was private. Only the host and hostess

and their charming daughter, Miss Ruby, and Mr. Andy Brush and ye scribe were present!

"It was the most unique announcement this editor, with his wide experience, has ever heard. It was made by the prospective bridegroom, himself!

"When we had reached the wine number on the menu—and the wine was from Andy's place, and it was Andy's best—Mr. Brush arose, and after we had all risen with glasses in hand, except Miss Mooring, who sat all covered with befitting blushes, Mr. Brush said:

"'It gives me pleasure on this befitting occasion, with the permission of the young lady's parents, first had and received, to announce the engagement of their charming daughter—Miss Ruby—and your humble servant; marriage to take place—'

Robert Ray crumpled the newspaper in his hands and rose from his seat, every drop of blood leaving his face.

"You haven't finished yet—you haven't read the reference to—you—and—me!" called Nevada, bewildered, as Ray rushed out of the door and into the fresh air.

Robert Ray wandered about the school grounds like an addled tiger. At times he would straighten up in all of his manliness and appear to shake off the blow that still lay like a heavy weight upon him. Then he would sink upon a settee or bench and collapse into a state of most utter dejection.

If the pupils who saw him had been other than descendants of a stoic race they would have raised an

alarm that would have attracted the whole school, but they passed on about their routine as if Ray's conduct was not out of the ordinary.

"Ru—by! Ru—by! Andy Brush!" alternately, quivered on his lips, repeatedly.

Then he recalled the cry of Nevada as he left the room—"The reference to you and me!"

"Reference to me?" he exclaimed in choked breath. "To Nevada and me!"

Then his anger rose again like that of a pricked, wounded animal. He raised himself up and walked about to start the blood into circulation. It felt as if it were frozen in his veins. Then he sat down again and nervously straightened the crumpled newspaper. Beneath the account of the announcement of Ruby Mooring's and Andy Brush's engagement, another article appeared under the head:

"Other Soicety Notes."

Robert Ray read:

"And there is a rumor that our popular young fellow townsman, Mr. Robert Ray, known as the young father of the city, will spring a surprise on his return from the coast.

"It is said that the principal object of his trip is to bring back, as bride, the daughter of the man for whom the town was named. This, too, in the face of the general idea which prevailed to the effect that Miss Nevada was to have been led to the altar by her childhood friend, Mr. Thomas Lansing. That engagement is said to have been suddenly broken off!"

Ray sat like a man trying to unravel a mysterious puzzle for a few minutes. Then his face lighted slightly and he thought he saw more clearly. His anger rose in proportion.

"So Mr. Brush, you have hatched out a plausible lie! And Jack Mooring! You have sacrificed her!" After a long pause he continued under his breath: "I fell for your scheme and came away. Mokava and your daughter have paid for my blunder!"

For the first time in Robert Ray's life the spirit of murder entered his heart. He looked at his watch and then consulted the railroad time table in the newspaper that had just shaken his very soul. He wanted to see; maybe the railroad had changed its schedule. But it had not, and he rushed back to Nevada and they hurried preparations to catch the first train.

CHAPTER XIX

A SHOT FROM THE DARK

THE SIGN of the Casino Annex blazed in electric letters over the front of the old Mokava home. The house had been re-wired inside, and from every opening came flashes like those from searchlights as the surging crowds passed from between the opening and the clusters of electric bulbs.

Loud laughter of women and men, mingled with the noises of gambling devices, interspersed with the oaths of those who swore when they lost and those who swore when they won, broke out on the night. Wires had been run among the branches of the cottonwoods which stood above the improvements, and the lights from these and the bright walks below, with benches scattered here and there in the shadows, gave the place the appearance of a small park. The overflow of humanity from the house had filled the space outside. The people of the town of Mokava had come to spend the evening in the camp's coolest place.

It was a small Monte Carlo without the finely-dressed women and the swagger men with and without titles; without the glitter of such costly jewels; without the babel of tongues; without the show of refinement—without any refinement at all. It had just become the favorite gambling and drinking place of the men—and the women, too—who had gathered out there in the desert from every nook and corner of

civilization, and from every kind of life and previous trade and calling.

Thus had become the home that the settler had intended for Nevada—the place in which he expected her to take her position in the world with civilized society in its best state. The piano, furniture, carpets, rugs, everything in the house had been interpreted by Brush, with Mooring in the background to aid him, as going with the winning. The settler did get the wearing apparel of Nevada, and some of her other personal belongings, after a heated argument, but these were begrudged by the new owners.

John Mooring and Andy Brush sat on a rustic seat beneath an isolated clump of bushes and watched the throngs. The glory of the spectacle was all theirs. They often came out of evenings and sat together and discussed their plans. They knew what others did not—that the camp was doomed. The life of the best mining camps departs at an early age, and the life of the “boom” camp goes with a flash and without warning.

“I am glad, Andy, that we did not accede to the wishes of Mrs. Mooring and Ruby to make this our home,” said Mooring. “It would have been an elegant place, and would have afforded plenty of room for us all, but we would have spoiled the best paying business proposition that we have left.”

“Yes, Jack,” replied Brush, “this plant will get us out of the desert in pretty fair shape. You know that while a sucker is born every second they only get ripe for pulling about every five or ten years—when you use

mining stock as your instrument. We will soon have all of the substance of your little circle corraled over at the private cache in the vault. Then we ought to run this place for a few nights for all it is worth, and then unload it on some sucker or an organization of suckers, and jump the town."

"We've got to do it quicker than you think, too," explained Mooring. "Those Flunkey letters are steadily getting in their work among the small depositors, and some of the larger ones are selling out and slinking away under the pretext of taking a vacation. Whenever they check out their funds I feel that we are out just that much and that we have stayed another day too long."

"How are Bob Ray and your man Stallings getting along? Say, Jack," continued Brush, "I think that fellow Stallings is named about right."

"Oh, I've let out Stallings and turned the job over to Bob Ray," replied Mooring. "You know we want to keep Bob down there. He would resent the bad luck of the squaw man and his loss of Ruby, and might withdraw his account from the bank before we finish our plans."

A shout of laughter rose louder than the other noises in the house. Mooring and Brush went inside to see what had occurred.

"Think of it!" laughed one of the women, pointing her finger at an embarrassed porter. "Bill saw a ghost a few minutes ago. It was floating about in the air just above the ground in the shadows near the old

adobe. It had something dark in its hands. Bill thinks it was a witch with her broomstick!"

The crowd all laughed again.

"Now, you folks think you have one on me," said the agitated porter, "but I'm not joshing. I don't believe in ghosts any more than the rest of you, and I am not afraid of them, but I saw something the last trip out there for that batch of wine, that didn't look good to me. I had had some trouble getting the lid off the new box which I opened and came out of the adobe rather unexpectedly. I came near running into a dark form with something in its hand. I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman—it scooted into the thicket so quick near where the old squaw man's teepee used to stand."

The crowd was laughing again when a waiter came to the porter's rescue.

"I had not told any one, but I am certain I saw something moving about in the shadows out there early in the evening," said the waiter.

"Here's another fellow who has got 'em!" shouted a gambler.

"Say, cut out this spookey stuff," cautioned Brush. "First thing you know they will be calling this the haunted house, and that will be a fine place for a gambling resort!"

"Why didn't you stay and investigate?" asked Mooring of the waiter. "If you don't believe in spooks why did not you close in on the object?"

"I thought nothing of it at the time," explained the

waiter. "Just supposed that it was some one who belonged about the place."

"Did you say it looked like a man?" insisted the banker.

"Didn't say—don't know," replied the serving man. "Just saw a dark object."

Then the crowd laughed again.

"I did chase the thing," interjected the porter. "That is, I started after it. But it darted into that thicket and seemed to become a part of it."

"Some of the girls were out there, probably," suggested Dick, the manager.

"Or perhaps the old squaw, Tehana, was nosing about," said another.

"No, she left camp yesterday morning," replied Brush. "I gave her a toy out of the room that belonged to Grant, the boy, when they lived here. She came here before she started away and began making signs and pointing to the room which had been occupied by the boy, and I took her into the room and watched her while she was in there. She found a toy gun which belonged to the kid and made a to do over it that was ridiculous. She was as much pleased as if she had found a gold nugget. You remember, Pearl," he reminded, turning to one of the girls, "I woke you and you had to get up and let us in?"

"Yes, and that kick you gave her was well-deserved for disturbing me at that time of the morning," replied the girl.

"What was the trouble with her and the squaw man—I hadn't heard about her leaving?" asked Mooring.

"Oh, she wanted to get back in the Death Valley country," replied Brush, "and the old man didn't want to go until Bob Ray gets back. She wants to go where they lived before they found this place—way back in Indian days. She got tired of waiting for the old man to get ready and struck out alone. She has gone ahead to prepare the way, as the good book says, and the old squaw man will follow as soon as he receives the blessing of Bob Ray."

"That will be a long time," replied Mooring, aside to Brush. "We shall keep Bob Ray busy down there until the old squaw man starves out here. He will be longing for some of old Tehana's stewed rabbit before he sees his friend Ray again."

"She is doubtless near her new home by this time," explained Brush. "The last time I saw her she was riding the old burro toward the south and looked like a speck on the desert. She was getting more speed out of that old burro, too, than any prospector ever got out of one in his life."

"That is a common fact," replied a bystander. "An Indian seems to hypnotize a burro when he gets astraddle of one. He controls a burro just like a negro manages a mule. I would like to see a race between an Indian on a burro and a negro on a mule!"

"Get your partners for the midnight quadrille!" shouted the floor manager. "The furniture has been moved out of the dining-room and we will have an old-time dance."

"Is it that late?" asked Mooring.

"Yes, but you can stay for one set," suggested Brush.

"And Annette Mooring still living!" exclaimed the banker. "I must avoid even the appearance of such evil, much less take a part in it—good night!"

Half a dozen girls gathered about Brush and offered their services for the dance. It was the first time the proprietor of the place had ever been so sociable. He had been talkative all the evening—ever since the ghost scare was started. He was feeling good over the prosperity of the new place, anyway, and had a smile for everybody.

"It is the Boss' last night out for awhile," said one of the girls with a wink. "He's going to get married next Sunday, you know."

"Oh, I'm going to dance with the Boss!" shouted another girl.

"No, you will dance with me, won't you, Boss?" begged another.

"You ought to dance with me to pay for waking me up so early yesterday," pouted the girl known as Pearl. "You know I didn't tell about the early call made by you and the squaw until after you told it yourself. Some of the girls would have made a scandal about it; would have said the Boss had made a new mash, and such things. I didn't shriek, either, when you gave her that terrible kick that sent her out on her head in the back yard, did I?"

"Say, let up, Pearl, and the first set is yours," replied Brush, with a broad smile.

"Mine next, mine next!" came other jealous voices.

"Oh, this is my night off, girls; I will dance with all of you before morning!" promised Brush.

"Honor your partner, lady on the left!" shouted the caller, and the dance began.

One of the last couples which had joined the set was a young gambler and a girl who occupied the room which formerly belonged to Amosa. The young man had found an old hat that belonged to the Indian girl and came out wearing it. The dancers began to grab for the hat as they circled around the room and soon it had gone from head to head. It finally landed on Brush's head, and he pulled it down close to his ears and wore it through the set.

The drinks had been served after the set was over and Brush was still wearing the child's hat.

"Speech, speech by the Boss!" shouted the crowd.

"No, no, let it be a jig!" called the girls.

Brush had gotten started and he decided to make as big a fool as possible of himself while he was at it. He pulled the child's little hat down still tighter about his ears and leaped to the middle of the floor and began the dance. He knew nothing about the art, and assumed a pose that was more awkward than natural. He was whirling about like a big bear in the middle of the room, and the crowd was shouting and laughing when there came a crash of glass. Brush stopped still for one second, reeled and fell headlong to the floor!

When the crowd had recovered from the first shock they realized that something terrible had happened. The still form of Andy Brush and the little spot of blood on the bosom of his shirt, and the hole in the

window pane exactly in line with the place where he had stood, told the story.

The bullet had come from the direction of the thicket near the adobe, and it had entered his heart.

Many had not heard the report of the firearm, but others had. After the crowd had gathered about the body from the other portions of the building, and learned what had happened, men rushed out in every direction in search of the murderer.

Within a few minutes three of the men returned, bringing a fourth. Dick, the manager, was in charge, and carried a rifle. His companions held firmly between them the prisoner.

"We caught him red-handed with this gun in his possession!" exclaimed the manager.

All eyes turned upon the accused.

"Me no savvy," he said.

It was Mokava.

CHAPTER XX

ROBERT RAY ARRESTED

THE town of Mokava awoke on its first murder. The man, Mokava, was in jail. He had preserved a silence characteristic of the race with which he had lived. His only statement was that made when he was brought into the presence of the body of Brush, while it was still warm. He had said he did not understand how it had occurred.

But developments came with the morning. John Mooring had been sent for early and had come away without disturbing his family, to investigate the killing of his partner. He was shown the window-pane through which the bullet had come; then he examined the ground in every direction outside on a line with the course of the deadly missile. But the place was covered with the tracks of those who had gone over the ground the night before, which made it impossible to get a trace from this source. He returned to the room, where a crowd was discussing the murder with the town marshal. The latter had the rifle which had been taken from Mokava.

"Why, that is Bob Ray's gun!" exclaimed Mooring.

"Are you sure of it?" asked the officer.

"Positively. Bob and I had that rifle with us on our prospecting trip. I have carried it myself. Why, that nick on the stock! I saw it made. We woke one morning and found a rattler under our bed. Ammunition

was scarce and Bob killed the snake with the butt of the gun. He struck it against the side of a rock while chasing the rattler and made that scar!"

"Ray is not in camp," volunteered a bystander.

"I know it; he is not expected to return for some time, either," replied Mooring.

"That's Bob's gun, all right, and it came from his room," said another of the crowd. "I remember it now. I know the gun. I was at Bob's room when he was leaving; that rifle was sitting in the corner of his room when we came out and he locked the door and left."

"You'd better go and search the place, officer," suggested Mooring. "I know it's Ray's gun; a search may throw some light on the murder; we can find out at least something about when and how the squaw man got the rifle."

The marshal led the way to the house where Bob roomed. The crowd followed. The officer was led to the room and called to the landlady to open the door.

"Knock on the door and I presume Mr. Ray will open for you, if he don't mind being disturbed so early in the morning," said the landlady, visibly disturbed by this early call at her place in such numbers.

"What, is Ray in there?" asked the officer in surprise.

"Yes, what is it?" came Robert Ray's voice from the inside.

"Open the door!" demanded the marshal.

The door was instantly opened by Ray, who was still in his night clothes.

"What's wanted?" inquired Ray.

"Where's your rifle?" asked the officer, looking about the room.

"I let Mokava have it last night," was the reply.

The men gazed at each other in amazement. Robert Ray looked from one to another with anger rising in his eyes.

"Why did you give the squaw man the gun?" asked the marshal.

"That is my business," replied Ray, his anger now increasing. "Say, you fellows, get along; I've been up a great deal of late and need sleep," said Ray, starting to close the door. "I shall take another nap before I dress."

"But the squaw man is in jail," stammered the officer, "and——"

"What? What is he in jail for?" interrupted Ray.

"Murder—he killed Andy Brush last night and it appears that he used your gun; you admit it, I believe?"

"Yes, he had my gun; but there must be a mistake; he didn't kill anyone. Mooring, will you never be satisfied until you get that old man in his grave?" asked Ray.

"He ought to be there—and you ought to have stayed where your business was," replied the banker. "Perhaps there would have been one more man living today if you had!"

"There is one, at least, living now, who ought not to be," muttered Ray. "Wait till I dress," he said aloud. "I must see Mokava."

"Not yet, Mr. Ray," came another voice. It was that of the prosecuting attorney, who had just arrived. "Mr. Marshal, you will take charge of Mr. Ray and keep him and the squaw man apart until we investigate further."

"I am your prisoner; I am not worrying about that; but I want Mokava released at once. I will go his bail," said Ray.

"We will first see if it is aailable case," replied the attorney. "It does not appear to belong to that class, just now—it shows on its face a case of cold-blooded assassination!"

* * * * *

The morning was growing, and, after glancing at his watch, John Mooring hurried to his bank building. But few people were stirring in that part of the town so early and he entered with the stealth of a burglar. He unlocked the door with a slow turn of the bolt and locked it behind him in the same manner.

He unlocked the vault next and went to the rear and began to remove a lot of rubbish. He uncovered an old valise of large dimensions. This he brought forward and lined it with wrapping paper. Then he set it down about the middle of the vault and produced a bunch of keys. With these he began to open the drawers of the depositors and transfer the contents to the valise. One after another contained large sums of money, and he smiled as he dropped it into the receptacle. Further toward the rear he came to a drawer marked "Mooring & Brush—Private." From this he

took the greater sum. He had locked the drawers behind him as he proceeded.

Then he stopped in front of a drawer labeled "Robert Ray." He smiled again as he opened this locker. "So Robert, you started the first trouble against me in camp; you created the first doubt of the stability of Burro Hill; you've cost me a great deal; you are paying some of it back now," he murmured, as he appropriated the holdings of Ray.

He then took what money the current depository drawer contained and placed the greater portion of the gold in his pocket. The remainder of the gold he put in front of silver coins of about the same size in the cashier's tray, where it could be seen from the outside when the blinds were raised.

He then re-entered the vault and took the valise containing the money to the rear again. He raked the rubbish aside and placed the valise near where he had found it and covered it over carefully, giving the place an appearance, as nearly as possible, of having never been disturbed. Then he returned to his desk and wrote a notice, as follows:

"Closed Today on Account of Partner's Death—
Open Tomorrow as Usual."

Mooring pasted the notice on the inside of the front door, raised the shades and left the place hurriedly for his home.

As soon as Mooring closed the door behind him a man began to climb down from the top of the vault in the bank. He had much difficulty in squeezing into the narrow space between the top of the vault and the

ceiling of the room. He was medium in stature, but stout and clumsy. Such work was not well adapted to him. But Horatio Stallings had done a number of things in life that were not adapted to him.

He was more active when he reached the floor. He first unlocked the vault door, and then producing a bunch of keys from his pocket he began to unlock drawers. To his surprise he found nothing left in the way of money. He crawled out to the cashier's tray and summed up only a few hundred dollars there. Then he remembered hearing a noise in the rear of the vault while Mooring was there. He went back and began to clear away the rubbish carefully. He came upon the old valise and had but little trouble in opening it.

Stallings' eyes sparkled when he discovered the contents of the receptacle. "Half a million at least," he calculated, while emptying the contents of the grip on the floor. He had discovered an old gunnysack among the rubbish. He placed the money which he had just taken from the valise in the old sack. Then he raised the old sack containing the money and hefted it several times to get its approximate weight. Then he began to fill the valise with tightly folded slips of paper, which he first cut into a shape similar to bills of currency, after he had folded large sheets together. He kept this up while he balanced the two receptacles in either hand until they appeared to weigh about the same.

Then he returned to the rear of the vault and placed the valise where he had found it, covering it with the

rubbish, with as much care as Mooring had used, to make it look as though it had not been disturbed.

There was a noise at the door and Stallings approached the door of the vault cautiously and looked out. He saw men gathering about the door of the bank and reading the sign which Mooring had posted. Stallings drew back quietly into the vault, closing the door behind him until it was almost shut.

* * * * *

"Wife, Daughter, terrible things have happened over-night!" exclaimed Mooring, as he entered his home. He followed with a brief account of the murder and then continued: "The squaw man has been in jail all night and they were taking Bob Ray to the lock-up when I left, for complicity in the killing; it was Bob's rifle that killed poor Andy! Bob came home on the train last night, but no one knew he had arrived until they found him in his room this morning. He admitted that he had let the squaw man have the gun!"

Mrs. Annette Mooring had uttered a hysterical shriek. It was her nature to give way to impulse. Ruby Mooring betrayed no outward sign of distress. It was her nature to master her feelings. Her heart only asserted itself by sending a crimson flood to her face occasionally to take the place of a pallor of which she was unconscious. So thoroughly did she master herself that the casual observer would have thought that the startling story told by her father was only of passing interest to her.

"Daughter, I shall have to look after the funeral of

my late partner and the prosecution of his murderers, as well as the business of the Casino Annex," explained Mooring after his wife had revived. "I have closed the bank for the day and put all of the money in place. I placed the cashier's tray in view of the window so that the depositors would not grow suspicious of the closing of the bank for the day. You had better go down and remain in the bank as usual, but do not disturb anything. Let any in who might want to make deposits, but do not pay out any money."

* * * * *

In the meantime Robert Ray had gone over the details of his connection with the killing of Andy Brush with his lawyer. He had also engaged the same lawyer to defend Mokava, and was asserting the innocence of the settler.

"I know that you are telling the truth, Bob, and that you had no idea what the squaw man was going to do with the gun when you gave it to him," explained the attorney, "but it looks pretty hard for him!"

"I do know what he wanted the gun for—he wanted to take it with him to the desert, as he said he did!" insisted Ray.

"I understand you, but this is private, Bob—as your lawyer—what was Mokava doing in the rear of the place so soon after the shot was fired? The rifle, the hard feeling between him and Brush—the fatal shot—the dead man—but we will make the fight of our lives for him!"

"I want him bailed out," replied Ray. "It will

break his innocent old heart—the confinement. He has never known anything but the freedom of the desert, a clear conscience, with the right to go and come as he wished.”

“His freedom at present is impossible. It is either murder in the first degree or nothing; not a bailable case.”

“I am outside—we are both charged with the same crime?”

“You are Robert Ray—he is the squaw man!”

“What difference does it make?” philosophized Ray. “If the pitiful, insignificant, so-called ‘father of the town,’ is white and has never lived with the Indians—and has some money—why should he be treated better under the ministration of the law than the great, noble-hearted, honest Mokava, who happened to be cast among the original settlers of this country, married, as God intended that all men should do, and had children by an Indian woman, and is living with and supporting his family?”

A knock came at the door from the reception room. The attorney rose and opened it.

“Is Mr. Robert Ray here?” came the inquiry from the visitor.

“Yes,” replied Ray, for his attorney, and came forward. He had recognized the voice.

“May I speak with you, when you are through?” asked Ruby Mooring.

“We are through now, are we not?” asked Ray of his attorney.

“For the day, I believe—you may call if you hear

anything new," replied the lawyer, closing the door between them.

Ray indicated a chair.

"I have not the time to sit, thank you. I just—"

Ruby Mooring's voice choked and Robert Ray saw that her eyes were glistening from tears. She drew her handkerchief and stepped over near the door which opened on the street and looked out. All of the anger and resentment left the heart of Robert Ray in an instant. He forgot that he was under arrest for murder; he forgot that Ruby Mooring was the fiancée of the murdered man; he forgot that he had ever entertained a harsh feeling against any person on earth. His heart had melted, and he was filled with charity for all mankind and womankind, and, especially, with charity for Ruby Mooring.

"I know it is sad, Miss Mooring, and an outrageous crime. But do not blame Mokava. I will be able to show that he is innocent—I know I shall. Mokava is incapable of the thought of crime of the smallest degree, much less cold-blooded murder!"

"But yourself—I heard you were——arrested——in jail? I went to the jail, but they said you had not arrived——yet!"

"No, I was permitted to go on my own recognizance, as the lawyers call it. But poor Mokava will have to stay there until the trial—it is not aailable case for him—he is a squaw man. But I shall visit and comfort him as often as I can get the time."

"So will I," said Ruby Mooring, sadly.

"You, Miss Mooring!" exclaimed Ray, looking into

her face. "You console the man who is charged with killing your——"

"Oh, look!" interrupted the girl, indicating the direction of her father's bank. "I fear they will break in! Will you go with me, Mr. Ray—I'm afraid to go alone?"

Ray approached the door where she was standing and saw a great crowd gathered at the bank. They were talking excitedly and making threatening demonstrations.

"Certainly I will go with you, if you insist, but home is the better place for you!" replied Ray.

"But Father told me to go to the bank, and I must go. Besides a woman might be able to quiet them."

They hurried to the scene, Robert Ray escorting Ruby Mooring.

CHAPTER XXI

"DEATH VALLEY OR DEATH"

WHEN Ruby Mooring and Robert Ray reached the bank the crowd was growing more boisterous. The men were complaining that it was not a legal holiday and that the death of Brush should not interfere with their rights to get their money at once. Miss Mooring entered the bank with her pass key and closed the door behind her. Robert Ray mingled with the crowd and began discussing the matter with the leaders.

"I have my money in the bank," he said, "and feel that it will be safe until tomorrow, at least. Brush was a partner in the business, and it is proper that the bank should close for one day on account of his death."

"Here you are taking up for them and you are charged with helping to kill Brush!" chided one of the men.

"I assure you that I have no love for any man connected with the bank, gentlemen, but I see no harm in waiting until tomorrow," argued Ray. "If your money is not forthcoming then I will join in such legal steps as are necessary to protect ourselves.."

"Legal steps!" sneered a chorus of voices. "If it comes to that we might as well say farewell to what we have in there."

"Flunkey says today is the day!" shouted a railroad man.

"Where is Flunkey?" asked Ray.

"He'll be here, and when he comes what he says will go," replied the first speaker.

At this juncture Mooring made his appearance. He had been delayed by the conference with his wife and was not aware of the gathering at the bank until he was near the place.

"How is this—are you out on bail, and did you get out for the purpose of raising this trouble?" Mooring asked Robert Ray.

"He's here taking your part, you gump," answered the spokesman from the railroad crowd.

"It isn't time just now to discuss murder cases, Mr. Mooring," replied Ray, ignoring the railroad man's answer. "You will have to satisfy these men or there will be serious trouble."

"Yes, get inside that bank and open up and hand us out our cash!" demanded a big fellow.

"Why, gentlemen, be patient, and I will explain," smiled Mooring, appearing as unconcerned as possible.

"We don't care for explanations," replied one of the leaders. "Just open the bank and continue to do business until we can get what we have in there—then you can close and do whatever you please. So hurry up and open up, if you don't want a rifle bullet where Brush got his!"

Mooring had opened the door partially and was about to speak again, when he saw the men preparing for a rush. He raised his hand as if he were about to

say something, then jumped inside, closed the door and locked it.

"Oh, we'll get in—wait until the dynamite arrives!" shouted one of the men.

The remainder of the forenoon passed without exciting incident. The men were waiting for something, doubtless, and remained about the place on watch until they should be ready for final action. They came and went as new members arrived, so that the crowd about the bank was not materially reduced. They had reached a silence that worried Mooring.

"Gentlemen," he finally shouted out of a window, "have you no respect for the dead? Go away until tomorrow morning and the bank will open its doors as usual."

"Flunkey said not to let this day pass without getting our money," replied the railroad man.

"Where is this man Flunkey?" asked Mooring.

"Never mind, he'll be here," was the reply. "The fireworks will begin then. He's coming loaded. You'd better get your daughter out of there. We don't want to hurt any women."

Robert Ray again begged the men to go away. He told them that he had all of his money there and that he was not uneasy. He approached the window near where Ruby Mooring was seated and begged her to leave.

"A daughter would not leave the side of her father when he is in danger," was her reply.

"We want either you or the money, Mr. Mooring," shouted one of the men, "though we much prefer the

money. We will use it more gently than we would you, if you will kindly hand it out."

The monotonous watch lasted throughout the day. Night had set in and the full moon rose across the desert, lighting up the men's faces almost as bright as day. The night train had just come in and the men were constantly looking in the direction of the depot.

"Flunkey ought to be here; that train has been in some time—did any one go to meet the train?" asked one of the men.

While they were still looking up the street toward the station a short, round figure came across from another direction. His hair was long and uncombed, his face wore a stubby, irregular beard. His clothes were soiled and slick with wear. He wore a slouch hat and carried an old valise in his hand.

"There he comes now—that's Flunkey!" shouted the railroad men.

"What does he say, boys?" asked the tramp-looking fellow in a friendly voice.

"Says if we will wait until tomorrow he'll pay us off," replied the spokesman for the railroad men.

"Well, 'spose we give him the time, but take no chances?" suggested Flunkey. "I have the stuff here that will get action on the place, but there can be no harm in waiting, if we see that neither he nor any of the money gets away. I should have come sooner, but couldn't arrange it. It's getting late now and we will have everybody here by morning. Let's have a fair division of the spoils, whatever they are. Let's take no chances, as I said before, men; let's divide up into

watches. There is no need of a crowd staying around here all night. I know where the rear door is. I'll take first watch there. Who will relieve me at midnight?"

This man of brains had controlled the gang of railroad workers when the road was being built, even in his drunken condition. The head men in the construction work had come to him for advice. Now the depositors of Mooring's bank followed his instructions implicitly.

The crowd had soon disappeared except a few men left at the windows and doors. Flunkey went to the rear door, after selecting a man to succeed him two hours later, out of the dozen that had volunteered.

"So long as we keep him bottled up in there we are in no worse position than when we came this morning," agreed the men.

Mooring had listened to the arrangements intently. Other men placed in his position might have attempted to escape by violence. The sudden opening of the door with a revolver in hand and its use either as a threat or with proper aim might have secured his freedom. But he was not a man of moral courage. He had never faced men. He had won his victories, such as they were, by subterfuge.

He had extinguished the lights in the main room and seated himself at the desk in his office. There was nothing to do but wait. Ruby Mooring was sitting at the end of the desk watching her father's face. She felt that her presence had been of some benefit during

the day, and that she might comfort him in his loneliness during the long night before them.

A light footstep was heard inside the bank. The two were looking at each other in amazement, when the tramp-looking man opened the door of the office and entered cautiously. Before the girl or her father had recovered from the surprise the man spoke:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Mooring! I can imagine your surprise at my coming. You may think it strange that I should come in this garb, but you cannot complain, since I come to save your life."

Then he removed the old slouch hat and with it a wig. He drew from his face a false beard.

"Horatio Stallings!" exclaimed Mooring with a start. "Daughter, this is Mr. Stallings—Mr. Stallings, meet my daughter, Miss Ruby!"

"We've no time to lose," said Stallings, with a tremor in his voice. "The man who is to relieve me on guard at the door is likely to come ahead of time. Others are likely to visit me at any moment. I know, Mr. Mooring, you have not the money to pay these people, and you must get away tonight; within the next few minutes. Miss—er——er—the young lady had better go home now. You, sir, will soon be on your way to freedom from these people, and I will hold the fort until morning."

"Daughter, will you kindly bring me that package from the vault before you go?" said Mooring to his daughter.

"Yes, Father," and the girl entered the vault and turned on the light.

"It's a private matter—I always take it with me when I go away from home," explained the banker to the visitor.

Ruby returned in a few seconds with the package and gave it to her father. It was the package which Robert Ray had picked up and returned to her when she dropped it at the ferry-house in Oakland.

"Thank you, Daughter—you may go now—you understand about the package?"

"Yes, Father—but there is no danger ahead, is there?"

"Oh, no!" replied the banker smiling. "The danger is all past now. Mr. Stallings will get me away safely, and—tell your mother she will hear from me in a few days. She will understand!"

Horatio Stallings showed impatience. He reminded Mooring that the time was limited and drew Ruby Mooring toward the rear door, after she had kissed the banker farewell. "Just a short time and all will be well, this time," Mooring had whispered consolingly to the girl.

A light shudder ran over Ruby's body as Stallings opened the door and disclosed the darkness outside. The nearest street lights had been turned out.

"Be not afraid," said Stallings assuringly. "A girl like you will find none but friends even in the darkest alleys of an uncivilized mining camp!"

"Oh, I shall not be afraid when I once get started—I shall take the back route home, and hurry at that!"

"Get down a little early tomorrow morning," instructed Stallings in a whisper, when he saw that the

coast was clear for Ruby. "I will need you. You may depend upon me—you can trust me!" he concluded as the girl stepped out into the night.

As soon as Stallings had closed the door behind Ruby he removed the old suit of clothes and donned a neat business suit, which he took from the old valise. Then he appeared before Mooring with the ragged clothes in his hands, and said in a commanding tone:

"Now, Mr. Mooring, get this suit of the late Flunkey on as quickly as possible. I am going to let you escape. I came all the way back to aid you in this escape; you've not much time left—hurry!"

Mooring was so deeply interested in the thought of escaping that he paid but little attention to what Stallings was saying. The men were not very different in height, but the banker was the thinner. When he had finished the change of clothing the banker looked at Stallings for approval.

"You will need a little padding at first in the stomach of your trousers," smiled Stallings, "and a little more later on," he continued in a lower, but more gloating tone.

Mooring's enthusiasm now made him deaf to everything except words that bore on his immediate departure. It all seemed so easy now. He had anticipated greater difficulty—thought maybe he would have to borrow a portion of Ruby's clothing the earlier part of the night. But now he would be able to walk out with the old valise and its precious contents practically without a chance of detection!

"And you are Flunkey and Stallings, both and the

same, and have been all the time," commented the banker, wondering why such a change had come over the heart of the man who had sent the mischief-making letters, and who Annette Mooring had led him to suspect, looking at him studiously.

"Yes, and more, but get ready to be on your way," replied Stallings, in a tone of impatience.

The false beard and hair were now in place under the skillful hands of Stallings and the banker was a fair counterpart of the late Flunkey.

"You may have this valise in which to take along anything you may need," suggested Stallings, with an inward smile.

"No, thanks," hurried Mooring. "I have an old grip in the vault that will look enough like yours to aid me in passing the guard; besides, it contains some old keep-sakes which I wish to take along."

Stallings followed him into the vault and saw him dig the valise from the rubbish. When they had returned to the office and were under the light, Stallings tapped Mooring on the shoulder and said:

"Set the valise down for a second; take these and put them in your pocket—you will need them!" offering the banker a bottle of water and some sandwiches.

"Oh, I shall not need them," assured Mooring, holding on to the old valise tightly. "I shall catch a freight train in time to get breakfast down the line!"

"No you won't!" rasped Stallings, his pent up temper now putting to test every effort to suppress it. "You are going to strike out on foot across the desert toward Death Valley as soon as you get out of this

building, and are relieved by the next guard. Death Valley, only, lies between you and life. It is Death Valley or death for you! It will be a hard fight, but by keeping a straight course a little to the west of south you may reach civilization on the other side."

"Why this extreme precaution?" asked Mooring, now looking angrily at his companion.

"The railroad and every other avenue of escape is guarded," replied Stallings. "There will not be any more trains out tonight—business no longer justifies night trains, except the regular passenger, and you know that is gone. They would kill you, even if you attempted to follow the tracks. There is but one way—it is the desert and the Death Valley route!"

"Since you have arranged the trap in which I am placed, and also the manner in which I am to escape from it, may I ask why you have put yourself to all of this trouble?" asked the banker, with a tremor of suspicion, but with an attempt not to show it.

"That is what I have been waiting for!" rasped the other victoriously. "Did you ever, in your hellish career, hear of ———"

The name was not spoken. It was caught by Mooring while it was forming on the lips of Stallings. The latter stopped and placed his face close to that of the banker. Mooring staggered as if he had been shot. Stallings caught him by the arm with a grasp that almost sent his fingers to the bone. He was just in time to keep Mooring from falling to the floor. Although they were about the same weight and age Mooring cowered like a pygmy in the grasp of a giant.

His eyes turned toward the floor and his body sagged from the hold of Stallings like that of a felon from the hangman's noose.

"It has been a long and tedious hunt," growled Stallings. "It was your fault. I blame the man. He is the stronger. No woman ever did a serious wrong that a man was not at the bottom of it! You have given me a long trail—let's see—seventeen years or better. But you changed your name—how many names have you, anyway? If I hadn't run across a silly picture that you had taken together on the beach I should never have known you, since I had never had the pleasure of seeing you until we met at the railroad camp—you a banker, I a tramp!

"I had some trouble in distinguishing you from the squaw man. The old picture I had lost, but I knew that one of you was the man—the brute—his image had been imprinted upon my soul!

"I had intended to kill you. You deserve it. Had I met you seventeen, ten—five years ago, I should have strangled you like a dog! But now I am going to give you a chance. You know what it is. Go outside the rear door and stand there until my relief comes. He is due very soon. When he comes say, 'Goodnight!' in a low voice and walk rapidly away so that he may not have time to try to engage you in conversation. And, remember, if they detect you they will kill you! They have been paid to do it—with your own money; or, rather, with money that you have fleeced from others."

John Mooring was as if mesmerized. This was the

hour that he had been dreading for years. He had been haunted with the belief that he would some day, somewhere, meet this man. The dread had become a disease. A hundred times he had been attacked by a disagreeable tremor upon meeting strangers, and explained it by stating that he was subject to attacks of vertigo or other ailment.

But he felt the weight of something in his right hand. He turned his half-closed eyes and saw the old valise still in his grasp. He remembered the packs of bills that he had placed in it the early part of the day. The thought of the victory that he was winning in his latest game—a cool half-million—started his blood again to tingling, even in the grasp and under the eye of the man whom he had dreaded for nearly a score of years.

He cast a cowardly glance into the eyes of Stallings. The latter raised his hand and pointed to the rear door. John Mooring slunk out into the darkness, clutching the big valise.

CHAPTER XXII

SHADOWED BY A MAN WITH A GUN

WHEN Ruby Mooring first stepped from the rear door of her father's bank the blackness of the night blinded her. She stood for a moment to get her bearings, and as her eyes were becoming accustomed to the new shade of dark she saw a shadow, even darker than the night, pass behind the corner of the rear of a building that extended nearer the alley than the others.

Stallings had said that she need not fear, clothing the assurance with a compliment, but now that she was thrown upon her own resources she decided to act upon her own judgment. Stallings' theory that a pure woman was possibly safer in the darkness and alleys of a mining camp than she might be in a city of better civilization, probably was true, but angry depositors of the bank of Ruby Mooring's father were on watch that night and they might suspect the banker's daughter, or even suspect that the banker was making his escape in his daughter's clothes. In fact, he had dropped a hint that led the daughter to believe that he might adopt such a ruse, before the arrival of Stallings.

The movement of the shadow had convinced her that it was there in connection with the run on the bank, and that it was still watching her. Instead of going up the alley as she had intended, which would require her to pass the place where the shadow was now doubtless

concealed, she decided upon another course. The street to the north was not so well lighted usually as the one to the south, and since darkness appeared to be the game of her "shadow" she would seek that side of the town. Besides, she knew of a vacant block over on the north street where all kinds of debris had been piled by builders and merchants. It was a sort of dumping ground for material that was too valuable to destroy and too bulky for thieves to carry away. If she could reach this place she fancied that it would be easy to dodge through the various trails between the walls of stuff and lose any one that might be trying to trail or attack her. Her home was a few yards only from the far corner of this ugly block.

Looking and failing to see the object of her fear she ran across the alley like a flash and then hugged the walls of the rear of the buildings extending to the alley. She came to a narrow place between two of the buildings as she felt her way along, and turned into the narrow passage. She edged her way through as fast as possible and reached the front on North street.

She looked out from behind the cover of the buildings and surveyed the street up and down and across to the vacant block. It was late and not a living thing was in sight. A small light flickered at the farther corner from a pole which made the remainder of the view appear even darker.

With a blundering rush that one often makes when safety lies more certainly in stealth, she ran as fast as she could across the street. When she reached the sidewalk and was about to enter a trail leading through

the piles of stuff on the vacant block, she again looked about in every direction to see if she had been discovered. To her dismay she again saw the shadower. He had stopped near the corner beyond the small street light. In the brief glance that she gave it she discovered that it was a man and that he carried a gun. The stock and muzzle were plainly outlined by a flash from the light.

Flight among the rubbish on the vacant block was the only thing left, unless she should boldly turn, walk up the street and face this man, who was plainly trying to intercept her. Ruby Mooring had the daring of most women when driven to a corner. She decided that if captured, caught or shot, it should be in the plan of escape that she had first adopted, and she darted into the trail across lots. She ran into all kinds of impediments. First, a protruding plank would almost trip her, then a block of wood or other obstacle buried in the ground, with just enough projection to intercept her foot, would interfere. Once she ran into a blind alley made by the irregular piling of some boxes and was delayed in getting her bearings again.

When she finally came to the edge of the block on the other side, she again looked out from behind cover to ascertain if her shadower had anticipated her point of exit from the complicated place. She hoped that he might have attempted to follow her, for in this event lay the chance that he would get entangled as she had, and come out at some point on another street. Anyway, the coast appeared to be clear, and she again started on the run, almost out of breath now.

"Hands up, and don't scream, you little ——!" came a voice from her right.

She recognized the voice and ran the faster. The man followed and caught her.

"You have given me the run of my life," said Robert Ray.

"And you have given me the fright of my life!" exclaimed Ruby Mooring, still trembling.

"Why did you not stop long enough to ascertain whether I was a friend or foe?" he asked.

"I didn't expect friends to be hiding in the dark like a—like a highwayman," she replied.

"Do I look like a robber?" he asked.

"What are you doing with that rifle?"

"I brought it out to use, if necessary," replied Ray.

"But you are already in trouble—is that the gun with which Mr. Brush was killed?"

"I should judge not—I bought it new early this evening, and it is supposed to have never been used before. They confiscated my old rifle for evidence at the trial of Mokava and I. The lawyers doubtless already have it marked Exhibit A, and probably will keep it for a spell."

"But what are you doing with the new one—is it loaded?"

"Yes, it has a peck of cartridges, more or less, in the magazine, and I have already told you that I brought it along to use, if necessary."

"Why were you out with it?"

"Lying in wait for you," he smiled.

"Well, you've found me?"

"Yes, and I shall see you home," he said, defiantly.

"You didn't need an arsenal to hold up and escort a poor defenseless girl to her home," she said in an injured tone.

"No, but you do not realize how serious matters have been. I have been in touch with the outside since we separated this morning. There is a vicious element among those men. They are not all depositors of the bank—that is, the most vicious are not. This class always join any kind of a lawless move, expecting to get something out of it in some way, either in the form of loot or the gratification of criminal lust."

"Were you there to aid Father?"

"No—not any further than the law demanded."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Ray."

"I was there in your father's interest so far as to see that men did not take anything that did not belong to them or commit a crime. But to come straight to the truth," he continued, with a tremor in his voice, "I was there to look out for you! You insisted on staying in the place. If those men had ever started, nothing but bullets would have stopped them. I didn't know whether they intended to blow up the place or not, but I meant to put a bullet through the man or men who attempted it while you were in there! And, if they had taken the course of storming the place and had broken in, I should have been equally active with this rifle—if they had dared to put their hands on you! You do not realize what a class of men were gathered there. Men in mining camps are usually considerate of women, but there are a lot here who do

not belong here—and when you get any class started into lawlessness they develop into beasts for the time.”

“Why this interest in me?” she asked coldly, looking up at him.

“You—you needed protection,” was the stammering reply.

“Have you turned knight of old that you should go out into the world protecting women indiscriminately?”

“Indiscriminately?” repeated Ray.

“Yes, there is but one woman whom you should go out of your way to protect!”

“I do not understand.”

“Nevada—your fiancée,” said Ruby, remindfully.

“Do you believe everything you see in the newspapers?” he asked.

“You appear to believe everything you read!” she said pettishly.

“What do you mean?” asked Ray.

“That you read that rubbish about my engagement and believed it!” she said in an indignant tone.

“Was it not true?”

“Had you no more confidence in me than that? Did you think I was a fool, a puppet of a woman that would think of marrying such a character—pardon my reflection upon the dead—that would permit my parents to barter and sell me to whom they pleased?”

“I—I—I—couldn’t understand it,” faltered Ray, “except under that old saying, ‘That one can never tell what a woman may do!’”

“And what about the man?” returned Ruby. “Ne-

vada is pure and good and worthy of you or any other man—but who would have thought that you—you, to whom her family is under such deep obligations, would take advantage of this friendship to undermine her real lover—think of poor Lansing!”

“It’s all a malicious lie, Ruby—Miss Mooring—I mean that stuff in the paper about my having any thought concerning Nevada, except that of a sympathetic friend!” emphasized Ray, with a movement of his rifle as if he would like just then to take a shot at an editor.

“I know it—knew it all of the time,” smiled Ruby. “It was a part of the scheme framed up by poor Father and Mr. Brush—and, joined in by poor, indiscreet Mother—to get me to yield to an engagement which was announced before I was consulted. There was nothing for me to do but to keep silent and await your return, as Mokava did.”

They were approaching the Mooring home. Ruby had taken Ray’s arm shortly after they met and they had proceeded slowly while they explained matters. But Ray now stopped suddenly and looked down into Ruby’s face. He could see flashes of happiness in her dark eyes even in the blackness of the night.

“Miss Mooring—Ruby!” he exclaimed. “I am a big gawk of a fool, as I have been since I first saw you in San Francisco that night! Will you——”

“Wait Robert—Mr. Ray!” she interrupted, getting closer to the arm she held.

“Call me Bob; cut out this formality,” continued Ray. “Ruby, I am going straight to the point of pro-

posing to you right now—keep quiet until I get through! I won't take chances on another minute's delay! I don't know how matters are going to come out—I mean from a business standpoint; there is nothing in that charge connecting Mokava and me with the Brush killing. I will not burden you with the details of our defense, but the evidence is clear and will show us to be as innocent of the crime as is your dear little self.

“What money I have is in your father's bank. I intended already to save his name on your account. I will see that every cent of it goes to pay others, if necessary. And, if the worst comes to the worst, Ruby, I can support you anywhere. I never seriously thought of marrying until I—oh, well it sounds like book stuff, but it isn't! I want you to tell me now—right now—that you will take a chance with me as my wife?”

“Would you marry the daughter of the man who has done so much against you—even charged you with murder?”

“I thought I had told you that I do not hold the offspring responsible for the acts of the ancestor,” he replied.

“Suppose my father should become a fugitive to-night; that when the hour for the opening of the bank tomorrow morning arrives it should be announced that he has absconded; that still worse, he had taken with him the funds of his customers, including yours—money that you entrusted to his care at his request while you were a guest at his house; would not all of

this come up sometime in your mind when you looked upon his daughter as your wife?"

"It is you—yourself, that I love, and shall always love and respect, without regard to your father or any one else; it matters not whether your father should prove to be a thief or just as honest as Stallings or Mokava—that has nothing to do with my love!"

"Suppose Mokava should prove a murderer and Mr. Stallings prove a scoundrel?"

"Impossible—but what's that to do with it?" he asked.

"You mentioned them just now as the basis of the kind of men in whom you believed, in connection with me."

"That was because they happened to enter my mind," said Ray. "Eliminate everybody then; make this a matter just between you and——"

"But wait a minute, Mr. Ray!" he continued, interrupting his train of conversation. "Miss Ruby, you keep trying to find skeletons in your family closet with which to frighten me. I am reminded that I should open my own closet door! To begin, I do not know if my own father is dead or living. I never saw him! He took my mother to a maternity hospital just before I was born, and Mother never left her bed after I came into the world! I was told after I got old enough to know that my father did not even attend Mother's funeral. He had disappeared. I was adopted by a poor aristocratic family of two. They had come to the Pacific coast from the south for the woman's health. She died shortly after they took me,

and the bereaved head of the family and I went back to their former home in Texas.

"Well, he soon went to the dogs—grief, I believe, was the excuse, though whiskey was the cause—and I drifted out into the world on my own hook while still a lad. So that you see I am older in experience than in years, at least."

"Go on and tell some more—how came you in San Francisco when——"

"Oh, when I saw you first?" he said softly. "Why, I drifted from Texas to Colorado; tried a mining camp; got a little stake, and attended a mining school. Then the excitement broke out in Nevada and I joined the great horde that headed this way. I went by San Francisco, in order to see the town where I was born—and, stumbled on to this little jewel, as we appear to do on all things that are good! So that's about all, except that I am crazy with happiness now after a long siege of lunacy brought about by the fear that I should never get you! Now, what do you think about my ancestor? Isn't my family skeleton a regular Goliath?"

"It isn't your fault!" replied Ruby, nestling closer to him. "You see, you have already taught me some of your theories in regard to heredity."

"And you will accept me, now?"

"Yes, Robert!"

They had reached the steps of the Mooring home. Ray drew a ring from his pocket and begun to separate her fingers in order to place the ring on the right one.

"You see, I had prepared for this before I read that contemptible——"

"One more minute!" interrupted Ruby. "Some strange things happened at the bank—on the inside tonight. There will be some disclosures tomorrow morning; I do not know what is in store, but I think you should know everything!"

"Oh, you want to tell me that Horatio Stallings is in the bank and that he came in disguise, and——"

"How did you know it—are you in league with them, too?" she interrupted.

"Wait, Miss Impatience! I had seen Stallings appear as the tramp, Flunkey, and heard him pull off that bluff about having dynamite in his grip. I believed it then and didn't propose to have that building blown up, especially while one Miss Ruby Mooring was inside of it. So I went and took this trusty rifle, as the hero would say, from its place of concealment and stationed myself at a point from which I could observe the rear of the building.

"Well, when Mr. Flunkey came back to go on picket duty I was pretty close to him. He took a bundle of keys from his pocket and began to try the lock of the rear door.

"I shoved the muzzle of my rifle under his nose and told him to hands up and keep silent, as I have been told regular holdups do. But I came near dropping said gun when my prisoner exclaimed in a whisper:

"'Bob, you fool, don't you know me? Say, you leave everything on the inside to me and you hang

about here until the girl comes out and then take her home!"

"Then you know more about it, Robert, than I!"

"I have told you all that I know; but it is in Stallings' hands and everything is safe. He said to leave it to him, and I have done so with the utmost faith. He left you to my hands and it has proved perfectly satisfactory—after I caught you! Now, may I put this ring on your finger with the binding obligation on each of us that it carries, or shall I have to hold you and force it on?"

She held up her hand and extended the engagement finger!

"Oh, but isn't it funny after all?" laughed Ruby as Ray was about to leave her at the door.

"What's funny?"

"Why, I thought at first I was being held up, and——"

"You are!" replied Ray, as he grabbed her about the waist and lifted her till the tips of her toes barely touched the ground and planted kiss after kiss upon her lips.

When Ruby entered the house she found her mother still up and the place all upset. Trunks were open and partly packed, the furniture was disarranged and many of the pictures had been taken from the walls; all of the beds that were not necessary for immediate use were stripped.

"What has kept you so late, Daughter—I need your assistance in packing."

"Things are all upset at the bank, and——"

"Oh, I know all about it—your father and I planned the whole matter before he left this morning."

"But why are you packing, Mother?"

"We are going away, of course—we will dispose of everything as quickly as possible and get out of this place. I wish we could get away tomorrow! But we cannot—we couldn't give the stuff away in that time. Your father will join us later; he will get away to-night."

"It will take several days to wind up the affairs at the bank," suggested Ruby.

"No, no. We can clean it up in a day, Daughter. There will be little to tell the few depositors who happen to appear tomorrow morning. Your father will be far on his way, and you and I will just go down and tell those who happen along that the bank has failed, sell off the fixtures and then dispose of the things in the house."

Ruby then knew that her mother was ignorant of what had really happened at the bank, but decided to lead her on.

"But we shall pay the depositors off as long as the money lasts, shall we not, Mother?" she asked.

"There will be none left," smiled Mrs. Mooring.

"Mother, do you mean——"

"That the bank has failed!"

"But there is considerable money; nearly enough to pay off the depositors, Mother!"

"Now, Daughter, you are getting old enough to be taken into our confidence. We have lived a hard life, as you know. Your father does not propose to go

back into the old condition of poverty any more. We have had too much of it. He is going to get out to-night, and is going to take enough money with him to keep us comfortable the rest of our lives——”

“But, Mother——”

“Do not interrupt me again. Your father is leaving tonight. We will follow as soon as we can get rid of the things. We will go to San Francisco and wait until he settles down. We will then live quietly in South America, or wherever he decides to take us and be free from poverty!”

“Whose money is he taking?”

“Everybody’s—all bankers who fail do that, Daughter—he will leave the building behind!”

“There are those who cannot afford to lose it—who have their last cent in the bank!” remonstrated the girl.

“That is their misfortune—that is the way of life: those who have only can lose; and, those who get it are looked up to. It doesn’t matter who you are, if you have the money—you are right; and, if you haven’t it—you are all wrong!”

“Robert Ray has his money in the bank; he put it there to help Father’s credit!”

“Bob Ray’s foot!” exclaimed Mrs. Mooring. “He is no better than others—not so good as many. Don’t be silly any longer, Ruby. We worked him as we worked others. Do you suppose we should have invited him to our house and permitted him to associate with you without a purpose? Why, we have been

easy with him. We had to use more drastic measures on the squaw man."

Ruby Mooring had now been given the real inside character of her mother and father. It was the opening of her eyes to a new phase of life, and her own father and mother were the principals! Should she hunt Robert Ray up at that time of night and tell him what she now knew? But he had said he had left it all to Stallings. Was Stallings in league with her father and mother? But her mother was not so deeply to blame, after all. Despite her mother's apparent independence Ruby knew that her father had always dominated her mother when it came to the real test, as if Mrs. Mooring was a piece of clay in his hands.

But had she done wrong in leading her mother on to divulge the plans, by pretending innocence? She really knew nothing, though, except that her father intended to leave. She thought he was only leaving to escape the wrath of the men whom he would be unable to pay. She hurried to confess to her mother:

"Mother, I knew Father was going away tonight, but I did not learn his plans. I thought he was going to leave because he could not face those whom he has wronged. I did have a vagrant thought once that he might take the money—I had read of such acts—but that passed and I supposed he would naturally do as near right as he could by leaving what there was to pay his debts."

"He will treat everybody alike; he will take it all!"

"Is Mr. Horatio Stallings in with Father on this—

swindle?" asked Ruby, wondering if Robert Ray, after all, was to be robbed with the others.

Mrs. Mooring looked at her daughter for several seconds without uttering a word. Her face assumed a new expression for every second of the time and turned as many colors.

"What do you mean, Ruby?"

"That Mr. Stallings is at the bank at this moment with Father; that he is helping him to get away; that he will take charge of affairs tomorrow morning. If it had not been for him, Father would not have been able to escape tonight!"

Mrs. Mooring started as if pierced by a knife. Then the blood left her face and she settled back in her chair with a low, almost inaudible groan.

"You are ill, Mother! Don't take it so hard; you know that Father will come out right in the end!"

"Go to your room, Daughter—leave me to myself until morning!" commanded the elder woman in a voice, though weak and sad, that still retained a tone of firmness.

CHAPTER XXIII

A NOTE AND A PICTURE

THE crowd was already gathering about the bank next morning. Horatio Stallings was still busy at the books. He had put in the whole night at work. After Mooring left he went to the corner of the vault and assured himself that the old gunnysack had not been disturbed. Taking it from its hiding place, he emptied out the money on a clean place on the vault floor and counted it. Then he put the different amounts back where they belonged as well as he knew.

Ruby Mooring appeared at the front door of the bank and signalled for admittance. The men gazed at her with surprise. She smiled innocently.

"How did you get out of the bank?" asked one of the leaders.

"Why, they tired of having a woman around and sent me home," she laughed.

But when Horatio Stallings opened the door and admitted her a more puzzled expression went the rounds of the men's faces.

"I didn't see that fellow in there yesterday," exclaimed a man who had been active in the demands on the bank.

"Neither did I, and I thought I watched things pretty close," said another.

"Where are the night-watchers?"

"I was on until midnight and no such man had entered the place up to that time," explained another.

"I took your place and I can swear that nobody passed through this door," volunteered the man still on duty.

"I was watching the side-windows and they have never been opened," announced another.

"Ask the man at the rear?"

"I have been on since I relieved Flunkey and there has not been a soul stirring," explained the man at the rear door.

"Where is Flunkey?"

"Yes, where is Flunkey?" asked half a dozen voices.

"I haven't seen him since I relieved him," explained the guard at the rear door. "He appeared to be a little gruff about something. I was a minute or so late and I guess he didn't like it. He walked away, carrying his big valise as if he were nervous."

"Say, tell Mooring to show himself—things don't look right about here this morning!" shouted one of the leaders.

There was no response.

The demand was repeated after a few seconds of waiting.

Horatio Stallings came to one of the windows and stood smiling at the crowd.

"Hey, Mr. New Man, where is Mooring? Is he going to open up on time?" asked one of the leaders.

"Just be patient, gentlemen," replied Stallings in an assuring tone of voice. "Every one of you will be treated right. You shall have a square deal. There will be no partiality shown."

"We are not here for talk about deals and partiality; we are here for our money, and we want to see Mr. Jack Mooring's face at the paying teller's window," replied the man who had asked about Mooring.

At that juncture Robert Ray joined the crowd. He was smiling slyly through the window at Ruby Mooring, and trying to speak to her in sign language, when Stallings called out:

"Mr. Ray, will you and two other gentlemen—any other two that the depositors may select—please come inside for a few minutes for a short consultation?"

"No trickery!" shouted half a dozen voices.

"No compromises; no delays," called out others.

"Mr. Ray is one of the largest depositors of the bank," explained Stallings. "I am asking for representatives of the rest of you; you want to be sensible about this matter and do nothing that would destroy your own interest. It is merely for facilitating matters that I have asked this.

"Wait until Flunkey comes!" shouted the railroad depositors. "We shall depend upon Flunkey."

"You may depend upon Flunkey," replied Stallings. "It is through Flunkey that your money has been saved. Flunkey was up late last night and may not appear among you. He doubtless knows that everything is all right. It will soon be time to open and I shall open the bank whether Flunkey is here or not. We want to begin giving you your money as soon as we can. That is why I am asking for this little consultation beforehand."

"Go in boys, but keep your eyes on them," agreed the leaders outside.

"I have asked you men in for your advice," said Stallings when the three had entered. "I am in charge here and want to wind up the affairs of this bank as quickly as possible. I want the home depositors paid off, and if there is anybody to wait I want it to be the outsiders, who may look to their securities. I have gone over the books carefully and checked up everything and I find that we are short exactly twenty-five thousand dollars. We can get that amount out of the building here and other town properties belonging to the bank.

"We have more than enough to pay off the men who are here and are likely to appear today or tomorrow—some of the local depositors are out of town. But what I called you in for is to ask your advice about taking chances on paying out in full, with the expectation of raising the twenty-five thousand shortage before the outside depositors return?"

"Our people want their money—they will accept no delays," replied the two men who had entered with Ray in one voice.

"But I was going to suggest," explained Stallings, "that we could deduct the pro rata of this shortage from each account and this would assure no further trouble. We can pay the men this on their accounts, which would leave only a small amount coming to each one, except Mr. Ray here, whose account is larger than any of the others. Some of the men

would not have their accounts reduced over a dollar, others more, and others not so much."

"Let the fellows who are not here look out for themselves; we have gone to a lot of trouble; serve those who come first!" demanded the two men representing the depositors outside. "If the paying don't begin, and in full at that, on the time promised yesterday by Mooring they will tear this building down."

"That wouldn't get their money," said Stallings with a momentary flash of defiance in his eyes.

"Let's see, what's the exact amount of my account?" asked Robert Ray.

Stallings showed him the figures.

"It will stand it," said Ray in an undertone. "Gentlemen," he continued, "I will take a chance. I will not withdraw my account until everybody else is paid. Throw open the doors on time, Mr. Stallings, and give them their money!"

"Bob!" called Stallings as the committee was leaving. "I want you to remain; I want you to act as cashier in handing out your own money to others," he smiled.

"That's all right, Mr. Stallings," said Ray, lowering his voice, "I will sacrifice the last cent for the sake of that little girl in there."

Ruby Mooring was then called and Stallings explained: "I want you and Bob to act as cashiers while I keep the accounts straight and write checks for those who do not know how much they have in bank, and who do not bring checks filled out for the proper amount. One of you go to the cashier's and the other

to the receiving teller's window, and when the time comes let us hand out this money as fast as we can and relieve the poor devils. I don't blame them for wanting their money; I've been broke myself!"

When the money and books had been arranged between the two windows where Stallings was in easy touch with his cashiers, it still lacked half an hour of opening time.

"Let's not wait, Bob, let's throw open the doors and begin the work," suggested Stallings.

"Let her go," replied Ray.

The crowd was still lined up far out into the street at a few minutes to twelve o'clock. Horatio Stallings looked out along the line to see how they were progressing in their work. His eye caught a glimpse of a woman, deeply veiled, standing near an electric light pole on the opposite side of the street. He did not look up for several seconds. But when he did so, he glanced out of an angle of his eyes so as not to indicate that he was looking in that direction.

The figure on the other side of the street stepped behind the pole, stood very still for a few seconds and then hurried away.

Horatio Stallings smiled to himself; but it was a smile mingled with many emotions. He had recognized the woman.

The crowd had dwindled to only a few at closing time. The line-up was reduced to a score when the hand of the clock reached the hour.

"Let's stay open until we finish—that is, if you two are not tired out?" suggested Stallings.

"Ruby—Miss Mooring must be tired," stammered Ray.

"A woman get tired of spending money!" laughed the girl. "Why I could keep this up another day and night."

"Don't get excited, gentlemen!" called out Stallings. "We are going to keep the bank open as long as there is a man at the window."

When the last of the depositors had been paid a crowd of men came hurrying across the street. They shouted for Stallings to wait before closing the door.

"We have about agreed that you are all right, old man," said the spokesman to Stallings. "A committee has been organized to wait on you and ask you to take on additional trouble, since you seem to be taking on a good lot anyway. We want you to take over all the matters of the late Andy Brush. He has no relatives, so far as we can ascertain, and we want you to wind up his affairs here. The employes are all back of us in this request."

"I'll let you know later," replied Stallings, "but one of the first things will be the closing of that gambling joint, if I have anything to do with the matter."

The committeemen went away divided as to the manner in which they should make their report.

"You two make a fine team," said Stallings, as Ruby and Ray were preparing to leave. "I don't know what I would have done without you, especially the young lady's hard work and moral influence, and your hard work—and money—Bob. That reminds me, Bob, you might as well take what money you

have above the amount which you have offered upon the altar of sacrifice!"

"No, let it stay until everybody else is satisfied. It is safe with you—safer than it would be in my pockets."

"It looks as though I ought to get down to dish-washing on that two days' lot of soiled dishes," said Ruby Mooring, looking about at the piles of plates and cups and saucers on the various tables, where they had been stacked after hurried meals.

"I'll send them to the restaurant, where they belong," said Stallings. "We ought to be able to eat and sleep in the regular way for a time."

As Ruby and Robert Ray left the building Stallings followed them with a meditative look. Then it changed to one of approval, accompanied by an expression softer than that of friendship. It was paternal-like in its depths.

The young couple were well on their way to the Mooring home before Ruby referred to the unpleasant subject of her father. "We have been too busy today to gossip," she began, "but I presume that you know Father is gone?"

"I suspected it from what you told me last night and from his absence from the bank today; but he didn't take much money with him!"

"I do not understand it all, Robert. I was guessing a great deal last night. I wanted to be on the safe side, you know. I knew that Father was going away, but suggested the part about his taking the money with him on a mere surmise. But when I went into

the house I found Mother packing the things to leave. She then admitted that Father was going to abscond and take the money. I started to hunt you, late as it was, and tell you about it, but I was afraid you would scold, after you had shut me off so often about the matter."

"And I would have scolded! Didn't I tell you that I had left everything to Stallings?"

"He must have persuaded Father not to take the money—anyway, he managed everything nicely. I am so glad! We owe a great deal to Mr. Stallings—and you! But you should not have met the shortage. You see, I am taking an interest already in your financial affairs! Do you think you will get it back?"

"I am not worrying. If it can be gotten back, Stallings will get it. I left everything with him last night and I am still relying on him. I consider myself lucky, anyway. I'm away ahead of the financial milepost, and have the promise of marriage of the dearest, prettiest—"

A small hand went to his mouth and covered it with its palm. He turned it quickly and kissed it repeatedly on the back. Then she drew it away.

"What will your mother do now that your father is gone?" asked Ray.

"She and I will follow Father as soon as we can sell the things."

"Are you going?"

"What else is there to do?" she asked sadly.

"Why, what did you promise me last night?" he asked with surprise.

"To marry you, and I shall, if you don't back out. But matters are in such awful shape. It is too late to speak to Father, and I know what Mother will say. You know I should have their consent, or at least, ask it before—"

"Do you think your mother will object to me now—after she knows all?" interrupted Ray.

"Yes—I fear she will. She spoke very unfavorably of you last night. But she didn't know of our engagement. She was just talking of Father's business affairs and gave her opinion of you as a side matter, not knowing what I thought about it."

"Let us talk to her," urged Ray. "Now is the time. I will lay the whole matter before her. Let's go in right now and beard the lion or lioness"—he smiled with a doubtful expression—"in her den!"

"It will do no good, I fear, but if you wish to try I will face her with you!"

When the two entered the house Mrs. Mooring was not at her accustomed place. Ruby ran from room to room until she had looked everywhere except in her own room.

"Oh, I expect she is visiting Miss Martin," she explained, remembering that her mother frequently visited the teacher since she had moved to the hotel. "Wait until I take these things to my room and we will go to the hotel and see if she is there."

Robert Ray heard Ruby sobbing shortly after she had entered her room. He knocked at the door, and, receiving no response, rushed into the room.

"Mother is gone, too!" she cried. "She left this

note and an old picture that I had never seen before. I just saw that she had gone away and could read no farther. She was morose this morning when I left, but kissed me more affectionately than she had for years and told me to go on to the bank. I never suspected that she intended to leave. What shall I do?"

"It is getting late, shall I take you to the hotel or get Miss Martin to come over and stay with you?" finally asked Ray.

"Get her to come, please."

Ray found the teacher glad to spend the night with Ruby, and after they had consoled the deserted girl as best they could Ray went to his own rooms downtown to put in such a night as such a condition of affairs would bring.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TRIAL OF RAY AND MOKAVA

THE court room of the new city hall was crowded. It was the first important case to be tried in the new district court, created for the town of Mokava, and the idle of the town turned out. They were there long before the time for court to open. Gay women from the Casino Annex had put on somber apparel and gamblers had come in milder clothes than they usually wore.

Robert Ray had been busy preparing the evidence for the defense. He had consulted his lawyers frequently, but he had more often talked with Horatio Stallings. He found that his friend was versed in the rule of common sense, which is the foundation of all law and its administration.

They had learned that the bullet had been extracted from the body of Brush and they had also ascertained its dimensions. Ray had found an empty cartridge shell at the rear of the old adobe building. This he had not told any one except Stallings and his attorney.

"If you insist I will attend the trial," had offered Stallings, "but I may the better put in my time on the business of the late Andy Brush—there is nothing in the charge against you and old Mokava, anyway!"

It was agreed that both should be tried together. Many of those present at the Casino Annex on the night of the tragedy had left the camp, but the prin-

cipal witnesses had remained. Nevada sat by the side of her father. She had been in retirement ever since her brother and sister were expelled from school and but few knew that she had returned from the Indian school where she had taken Amosa and Grant. She had spent the time since her return mostly at the room she had taken on the night of her arrival.

Ruby Mooring sat farther back in the audience, heavily veiled. She had promised not to attend, but when the time came she could not resist coming that she might be near Robert Ray in a time that looked to her like a crisis, though he had insisted that there was nothing in the charges against him.

The jury was selected without delay. The district attorney excused two or three, but the attorney for Ray and Mokava accepted them as a whole. Witnesses were first called who were in the room with Brush when the fatal bullet came through the window. They detailed the circumstances of the tragedy without being cross-examined by the attorney for the defense. The porter and waiter then described the apparition which they had seen out near the adobe early in the evening, but were now certain that it was the form of a man, and were not in doubt as at first.

The men who made the arrest followed and described the taking of Mokava. They came upon him when he was walking rapidly from the direction of the Casino Annex shortly after the shooting. He was carrying a rifle—the one shown to them. They had taken it from him and extracted the empty cartridge shell which they identified before the jury. Mokava

had made no declarations further than that he asserted that he did not understand—"did not savvy!"

The physician who had held the autopsy was called and testified that the shot which he had found in the body of Brush had caused the death. He was about to leave the witness stand when the attorney for Ray and Mokava asked:

"Have you the bullet that was extracted from the body, Doctor?"

"I have."

"Kindly produce it!"

The physician took a small bullet from his pocket. It was oval-shaped at one end and concaved at the other. He explained that the bullet was practically in the same form as it had been when it left the gun. He said that it had struck no bones and that its contact with the window-pane had not lessened its velocity to any considerable extent. Then he gave it as his opinion that the missile had but a small charge of powder behind it, or that the powder had been damaged in some way.

Witnesses then testified that Robert Ray was the owner of the gun which had been taken from Mokava. Others were called who testified to the gambling of Mokava at the place of the deceased prior to his death, of the winning of large sums of money and the home of the settler, and his ejection from the place the following day. Others told of the kicking of the squaw wife of the defendant from the premises by Brush two mornings prior to the tragedy.

Witnesses were then called who testified to the close

friendship existing between Ray and Mokava, and of the strained relations between Ray and the deceased, especially of the altercation between them at Brush's place prior to Ray's going away. Then the episodes in which Ray took part in the water and townsite disputes between Mokava and Brush and his partner were also explained.

The prosecution then rested its case.

A blacksmith, who was also an expert repairer of guns, was the first witness called for the defense. He was shown the cartridge shell which had been introduced as having come from the rifle found in Mokava's possession and then given the bullet which was cut from the body of the deceased. Then asked his opinion as an expert if the bullet had come from the shell in his hand, he fitted the two together several times and smilingly said:

"No! This is a thirty-two caliber bullet and the shell is a thirty-eight."

A ripple of surprise ran through the audience while the jury was examining the bullet and cartridge shell, and Ruby Mooring gave a sigh of relief. The sincerity of the gunsmith was so apparent that the prosecuting attorney did not ask him any questions.

When the jury was through with the examination of the shell and bullet Robert Ray asked his attorney to procure the bullet. He did so, and while the attorneys were quibbling over a point of law Robert Ray slipped the shell, which he had found at the rear of the adobe, from his pocket and tried the two together. They fitted snugly and he knew he had found the

shell from which the bullet had sped to the heart of Andy Brush. He slipped the shell back in his pocket and gave the bullet to his attorney, who had just seated himself. No one perceived the act.

Ray then took the witness stand. He stated that Nevada, the daughter of Mokava, had returned with him from the Indian school on the night train just previous to the murder, and that he had sent for Mokava, who had visited them at the rooming house; that after a consultation about Mokava's affairs and the departure of his wife, it had been decided that Tehana would be needed to sign some papers; that Mokava was to leave on the following morning to bring her back. He had suggested to Mokava that the latter might get a chance to kill some small game on his trip, and volunteered the loan of his rifle. The settler had accepted the loan of the gun and was starting away with it.

"At that juncture," said Ray, "a shot was heard in the direction of the Casino Annex, and we all noticed it for the moment, but concluded that it was one of the ordinary wanton shots which are frequently heard about camp at night. Mokava then left us and went towards his teepee. His route led by the rear of the Casino Annex."

Nevada and the landlady followed Robert Ray upon the stand and told subsequently the same facts that Ray had testified to. Other witnesses were called, who stated that the nearest practical route from the house where Ray was staying to the teepee of Mokava lay along the rear of the Casino Annex.

"To be frank about this matter, your honor," said the district attorney, "it is my opinion that we have the wrong persons arrested in this case."

"I agree with you," smiled the judge. "Gentlemen of the jury, you will sign a verdict finding the defendants not guilty!"

Nevada threw her arms about her father's neck, and the veiled girl back in the audience came near forgetting herself and following Nevada's act, though it was Robert Ray's neck that was about to receive her arms, when Ruby Mooring thought of herself and extended her hand instead.

* * * * *

The sun rose red over the restless sands the following morning. Two lazy burros, driven by Mokava, drew a rickety, weather-beaten old wagon in front of the rooming house where Nevada had been living since her father's arrest. The wagon was loaded with supplies and also contained some bedding and the old teepee which once stood at the rear of the adobe, now used as a storage room for the Casino Annex.

Nevada came out of the house wearing a dress of a coarse material which she had made for outdoor use. Her father still sat in the wagon.

"He promised to be here and say good-bye—there he comes now!" smiled Nevada.

"I was a little late," apologized Robert Ray. "Slept so soundly last night after the great load was lifted from our shoulders, Mokava, that I came near failing to get up on time."

"I expect it was the other way," teased Nevada. "I guess that after you and Ruby left our place it took some time to get through discussing the trial."

"Now, Nevada, Ruby and I did talk some before I left her last night, but it happened to be mostly about you," explained Ray. "And I agreed to come as her emissary to you this morning. We decided that you should not make this trip. It is useless. Your father will be able to do as much, even more, than you. He will persuade your mother to return. It will all be a trip of hardship for you for nothing. You are not accustomed to the desert as you were in the olden time, and it is really a risky trip for you

"We had planned some surprises and will tell you what we are expecting for you and your father. Your father never executed any deed conveying the home to Brush, and Stallings, who has charge of Brush's affairs now, is an honorable fellow. He will see that you get justice. The consideration having been a gambling debt, everything was void in law. To be frank with you, we expect to see you installed in your own home again within a few weeks. Stallings has stopped the gambling there already."

"Father would not take advantage of the technicalities of the law," replied Nevada. "A gambling obligation with him, though he was drinking when he gave it, is just as binding as his mark would be to a deed. I would not have him repudiate a transaction because he acted unwisely. He and his family must bear the consequences."

"But we will not permit them to do it," replied Ray.

"I must go with Father," continued Nevada in a sad voice. Mokava had gone into the house for something which he had forgotten. "I must not leave him again. If I had stayed before, those terrible things would not have happened. I feel responsible for it all in a way. You know that you told me, Mr. Ray, what Mr. Stallings said about the duty of a daughter to her father? I shall follow it. And, if it comes to the worst; should Mother refuse to return and Father insist on remaining with her, as he will, I shall also stay. I have left him for the last time. Whether it be here, out on the borders of Death Valley, in Death Valley itself, I shall remain with him. Here he comes now—jump in, Father, and let's be going!"

Mokava spoke to the lazy burros. They moved off at a snail's gait toward the desert. The old wagon creaked and reeled from age and exposure to the weather. Nevada looked back once. She saw Robert Ray hurrying along the street toward the Mooring home.

"Happy Ruby!" she said, lower than her breath.

CHAPTER XXV

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF THE SANDS

CHIEF of the Land of Fire sat alone in his home. He called it his wigwam. It was a combination of house, dugout and teepee. It was constructed of logs, earth, brush and cloth. A square nick had been dug into the side of a mountain, and above and around this had been built the home of Chief of the Land of Fire.

Behind towered precipitous mountains. In front rolled the sands of Death Valley. On the peaks behind the snows never melted. On the wastes in front the sands never cooled. The elevation was known to the Indians as the Mountain of Ice. The plain was called the Valley of Fire. Chief of the Land of Fire had not ascended the mountain for many years. Neither had he gone out into the plains.

He sat in the same place throughout the day. It had been a sort of throne in its time, where he had ruled many. It was an unstable piece of patch-work now where he still sat like a chief, but he ruled only three—his two sons and a daughter. The seat had been a chair in its time. What was left of the original indicated fine material and good workmanship. A few pieces of mahogany were still held together by a variety of materials. Native mountain growths supplied missing portions of the furniture and they were bound in place with rawhide, buckskin, strips of cloth and such

other aids as had come to hand. Each repair showed a different age, and the carving on the mahogany was of a style in vogue more than a half a century before. The seat was cushioned with the fragment of a pelt of a mountain sheep, patched with the soft furs of the rabbit and the weasel.

Chief of the Land of Fire was too old to stir from the place. He was so old that no one longer guessed at his age. The occasional prospector in years gone by had said that Chief of the Land of Fire must be over an hundred. If appearances should enter into the indications of age, Chief of the Land of Fire would pass for a century and a half.

Though so stooped and crippled by time that he could not straighten himself or leave the chair without aid, his eyes were as clear as youth and his memory had never faded. Fragmentary evidences of a long civilization, other than the traces of mahogany that aided to support his body, were scattered about the place. An old-fashioned clock of generations back, and which had not run for perhaps a quarter of a century, stood in the corner of the room in which Chief of the Land of Fire sat. A small table, with two legs of the original manufacture and two added from mountain saplings, had to lean against the wall for support. An old trunk that once had been covered with leather, but now worn deep into the wood, with strings of the leather only hanging from about the metal fastenings, sat in another corner, the most precious souvenir of a far-distant past. Old firearms, with flint and steel and pan devices for their dis-

charge, adorned the walls and corners, while a modern repeating rifle lay in the rack over the door.

This was the room occupied by Chief of the Land of Fire. It was a log-built portion of the structure. Back in the apartment built of brush and earth, and ragged pieces of duck, which were attached to long poles that stood above the whole like the dome of a teepee, were other relics of the time of those in the front room. Pots and pans, worn thin with use; parts of dishes and plates; forks with one prong, and knives ground narrow as needles; a coffee-mill nailed to a post, whose handle had not been turned for a score of years; fragments of hand-painted china that had once been a cup, saucer, or perhaps a dish or a plate; and a single piece of glass, which was bandaged together like a victim of a wreck, hung by a network of strings from the center-pole.

An aged Indian woman moved about this room as crones do. She was apparently busy, but did not appear to be doing anything.

The old chief constantly shook his head while he murmured in a shaky voice. It was his way of giving emphasis to his thoughts. It had been his custom for years. He could not distinguish the myriads of memories that crowded his brain, the one from the other, without giving them words for his own ears.

While the fragments of the duck lashed at the tops of the poles over that part of the building used as a kitchen, from the gale that shook the place, with a sound that gave the impression of coolness outside, in reality it was suffocatingly hot. The wind itself

was off the great rows of restless, sun-heated sands that piled upon each other like waves of the sea for miles out in the front.

The old chief grew more restless and talked even louder to himself as the gusts shook the place more violently. His two sons were overdue. They had started out early to overtake a truant burro that had made another break for liberty. The animal had frequently attempted to cross the desert and return to the place from which it had come upon them of its own volition. But every animal and thing that came upon that side of the Valley of Fire was considered a part of the constant flow of flotsam and jetsam that of right belonged to the Chief of the Land of Fire.

Though the sons of the chief were experienced in the desert, he knew that no living thing could escape from the Valley of Fire when once properly within its grasp. It had been a place of destruction and death ever since the chief first set his foot upon its borders so long ago that he could no longer remember, and every time his sons ventured out into the place he had no rest until their return. The sun was hotter than was usual so early in the day and the wind was more like a furnace-draft than it had been for many days. The time for the return of the men had passed. He had told them that if they did not recover the animal before the heat of the day should set in to come without it. But for the fact that his legs were old and bent with the shape of the patched chair upon which he sat he would have risen and gone in search of the young men.

But he was finally put at ease by hearing their approach. He was surprised, however, when they entered. They were carrying between them a body more dead than alive. As they passed through the room of the old chief and entered the cavernous place in the rear which was used as a bedroom, he was unable to tell from where he sat whether it was the body of a man or woman that his sons carried, so torn and ragged was the clothing, and so blistered and distorted were the limbs.

The men called to the squaw and she brought water and cloths; and while she was bathing the face and body of the unfortunate the sons of the chief were also working over the form. One soon left and brought fresh water from the spring and the other was using such remedies as were known to the Indians for restoring those who had been overcome by hunger, heat and thirst. At the same time they were applying soothing lotions to the swollen and blistered parts.

Thus they worked for several minutes before they spoke to their father. A human life was at stake and there was no time for explanations. They had brought others in before from the desert, and many had passed away after they thought they had them on a fair way to recovery.

When they had done everything that was known to them for the relief of the unconscious man they turned the work over to the Indian woman and went into the kitchen and ate. They hurried through, for they knew the anxiety of their father to learn about the details of the adventure. Such things always

brought new life into that desolate place, even if the unfortunate victim failed to survive. It afforded new discussions and gossip to these people who saw so few and heard so little outside of the cry of the coyote out in front and the wail of the mountain lion up in the rear.

After completing their meal, Bill came to the side of his father, and Tom went on to perform the chores of the place. The old chief had given his sons white names, for he had seen more white men since they were born than he had seen of his own race. Bill was the oldest son and would succeed his father as chief.

It, therefore, devolved upon him always to impart to his father such information as he desired.

"We did not find the burro," began the elder son, in his father's tongue. "We were on his trail but he was far ahead when we came upon the tracks of the white man. You have always taught us, Father, that a human life is more valuable than that of an animal, even if the animal is our own and the human being is a stranger.

"The white stranger is in a bad condition, the worst we have ever brought in. He had traveled on foot many days and nights, doubtless, for his shoes were worn from his feet and his feet and body are a mass of sores and blisters. His feet no longer look like feet. He was naked to the waist and a few rags only clung to his body. He had passed through the sand dunes near the salt-banks just ahead of us when we struck the trail. It was still fresh, but the soft sand

filled his tracks in many places and the piles of sand obscured the view.

"We knew that he had lost his senses, from the trail he left behind. In many places he had run in a circuitous course like a wounded rabbit. We found him, too, by accident. We had reached the place known as the whirling sands and had lost his trail. We turned back and found his body in a most peculiar manner. It was almost covered by the drifting sands when we saw something shining like glass in a sand-bank. I approached and it was the reflection of the sun from his glazed eyes which were sad to behold.

"It took all of the water which we had left in the canteens to revive him so that his breathing became regular. He could not swallow, for his tongue protruded far out of his mouth. But after applying the water to his face and mouth repeatedly his breathing justified our attempt to start with him. We placed him on the big burro, and while one led the other had to walk by his side and hold him on. We had to stop often and fan him with one of our hats while the other was held to shade his face. It was the most tedious work we have ever had of the kind, my father."

"Call your brother, I want to see the man before he dies," said the old chief.

"He is horrible to look upon, Father," explained the son.

"Why tell me this, my son? Your father, who has seen them by the score often at a time! Your father, when no older than yourself, found nearly a hundred

strewn along the desert and not one was alive, except a mother and her small son, a baby on her breast. Why, boy, there were never such sights before or since! And to tell your father that the face of one man is not fit for him to look upon! I shall never forget the little baby boy and the mother. I brought them both in. She lived for several days and knew everything, but the terrible shock finally killed her."

"But you are older now, Father, and such sights are not good for you," remonstrated the son. "The tongue will not go back into the mouth and the eyes look as if they are blinded forever. The face is swollen out of all proportions."

"Call your brother," demanded the chief. "Do you think I am turning squaw?"

The young Indians reluctantly carried their father into the other room and set his chair by the side of the body of the unconscious man. His face was covered with the wet rags which the Indian woman kept applying to the swelling. The old chief, with his own hand, removed the cloths. He looked for a moment only upon the face with doubt. Then he bent forward and exclaimed with unsteady voice:

"Mokava! Mokava! My white son, whom I brought when a baby with his mother from the Valley of Fire! He is paying for his squaw!"

CHAPTER XXVI

RAY SEEKS MOKAVA

A WEEK had passed since Mokava and Nevada left for the desert. Horatio Stallings had gotten the consent of the creditors of the late Andy Brush to turn back to Mokava his home. Stallings had also realized on properties belonging to Mooring and the estate of Brush a sufficient sum to pay off the depositors of the bank, including Robert Ray. He was also corresponding with the San Francisco creditors of Mooring and Brush for a settlement of the last indebtedness of the firm.

The San Francisco banking company had foreclosed on their securities and bought them in at the sale under a mistaken idea of their value, and reduced the debt to less than one hundred thousand dollars. Stallings was trying to get them to accept the remaining stock held by him for Mooring and the estate of Brush in full settlement of the indebtedness.

Robert Ray had insisted that Stallings should satisfy all of Mooring's indebtedness, even should it take the last cent of Ray's deposit, which was still in Stallings' keeping. Stallings and Ruby Mooring still kept the bank open as an office and to wind up the odds and ends of the concern that dragged along unsettled.

Robert Ray became anxious about Mokava. He had expected the settler to return within a few days with Nevada and his squaw wife and settle down at

the old place. He had also planned a surprise for Mokava, in which he expected to give him a sum of money that he had realized on a claim he had sold in the early days of the camp, and in which the settler was interested. They had given the matter up as worthless.

Robert Ray found a chauffeur who knew the desert and who informed Ray that he could take him in his machine to the house to which Mokava and Nevada had followed Tehana. He said they would have to go a roundabout way, but he could reach it within a day. It was beyond a mountain and at the foot on the other side in the edge of Death Valley, but the chauffeur knew of a route through a pass which would enable them to reach the place with comparative ease. He had taken two promoters to the place two months before, who contemplated filing on the water rights of Mokava's old spring, but they had decided, after investigating, that there was not sufficient flow.

Ray had planned to leave next morning and called on Ruby Mooring the night before to get some letters which Ruby had taken from the postoffice for Nevada, and to arrange the definite date of his marriage to Ruby. Miss Eva Martin, the teacher, who came to live with Ruby after her mother left, had gone to her room for the night and Ray and Ruby had the parlor all to themselves.

"Same old story," said Ray; "haven't heard from your mother yet?"

"No; I do not understand it," was the reply. "She probably has not heard from Father and is doubtless

waiting to hear from him before giving me an answer. She referred to things in that letter that she left behind that I have not the courage to undertake, but if I don't hear from her by the time you return from this trip I will act. We will fix the date then; it matters not who should be consulted. I will take the whole responsibility."

"It strikes me, my dear, that you have been left on your own responsibility already," said Ray, in a disappointed tone. "I think it is about time for you to decide the matter for yourself!"

"I place myself at the mercy of the court, as your lawyer said the other day," replied Ruby. "You shall be the court and make the decision. If you are displeased with my desire to have the consent of either my father or mother, and think it proper to abandon further attempt to communicate with them, then I am ready now to fix the date; let you name it. I would marry you if they both should refuse, but I did wish to obtain their consent so that they would have no excuse to throw it up to me in later years. But you, Robert, you shall decide!"

"Well, we will wait for a reply until I return, little one," he said. "If we don't hear anything by that time I shall insist that we get married right here and start away at once on our honeymoon. Stallings can give you to me!"

"That will be jolly," replied Ruby Mooring. "Now, don't fail to bring Nevada back with you. Tell her that we want her at our wedding. Be sure and give her these letters. One is from Amosa and the other



"YOURS, ROBERT!" SHE REPLIED, AS HE DREW HER CLOSER TO HIM AND GAVE HER A LONG, PARTING KISS.



is from her fiance, Lansing. I know the handwriting of both. This is the scrawling hand of Amosa and this is the smooth writing of the engineer. She has shown me their writing before."

"And she and Tom Lansing will get married some day," said Ray.

"I suppose so, but she doesn't seem to care much for him," replied Ruby. "She doesn't care to talk about him, while I want to talk about you all of the time—to my close friends! Am I not silly?"

"We egotistical men like such silliness, little fidgety—now, remember, you will become mine for all time, and forever, just as soon as I get back, letters or no letters, consent or no consent, mine!" said Ray, softly.

"Yours, Robert!" she replied, as he drew her closer to him than ever before, and gave her a long parting kiss.

* * * * *

It had been a long day on the desert. But the automobile which carried Robert Ray had been made for the rough usage of the country, and they were gliding down the side of the mountain before sunset with the little rock house of Mokava nestling near the spring which bubbled out of the side of the elevation.

Nevada came out of the house with a sad look upon her face. But she gave a smile of relief when she saw her father's friend.

"Here are letters," said Robert Ray. "Cheer up—there's one from Lansing! Oh, I know his handwriting," he continued. "And there is one from Amosa. I have lots of good news—where is Mokava? Did you find Tehana tired of waiting?"

"I have been here three days alone," replied Nevada. "Mother was not here when we arrived, but she had been here. We found the tracks of the burro; and she had made fires and prepared several meals. Father waited a day and night for her to return and then started out to look for her. He has been gone so long that I am terribly worried. I fear they both are lost!"

"Where was she likely to have gone?" asked Ray.

"She may have attempted to go to her old home, her father's place," explained Nevada. "She had not heard from him for many years. He was very old then. He has doubtless passed away. He lived at the foot of the high mountain over on the other side of Death Valley yonder. He was called Chief of the Land of Fire. A very peculiar name, but the Indians name everything and everybody in their own way. It was an appropriate name for Grandfather, for he has lived on the borders of Death Valley for nearly a century, if he is still living, and the country is known as the Land of Fire, because of its terrible heat. I cannot account for Mother returning to the place, for she and Grandfather were estranged since she and Father married, because Father would not pay for her—but you remember the old tribal legend?"

"Oh, it looks of late as if I shall be compelled to believe in that old legend—so much has happened to us!"

Nevada hurried dinner for the two men. They had brought along a lot of fresh supplies and these, with those Mokava had on hand, enabled the girl to prepare a meal that was enjoyable in the desert. After they

were through and she had cleared away the dishes Robert Ray suggested that he and the chauffeur should go to bed early, so that they might get out in search for Mokava and his wife while it was cool next morning.

Nevada prepared a bed in the house for the two men and went out into the teepee which had been pitched by Mokava near the spring, to spend the night. She opened the letters which Ray had brought and began to read the one from Amosa first. After reading the introductory portion her face began to assume a worried expression, and it looked more disturbed as she proceeded.

"Things have gone bad here, too, dear sister," the letter ran. "I do not know what to do or say. Grant has run away from school. He heard of the way they treated poor Father about the home and said he would get revenge. He said he would burn the house before they should keep it. And since he left we have read in the papers about Father being in jail for killing Andy Brush. When Grant learns this he will do something terrible. Of course, he will know as we all do, that Father is not guilty. It must be some kind of a trumped up charge by that fellow Mooring.

"But keep a lookout for Grant. See him before he does anything, if possible, and try to persuade him out of the notion. You can do more with him, Nevada, than anyone else. He went so far as to say that he would kill Mooring and burn the town. You know he has not gotten over being turned out of school that morning."

After a long silence she took up the letter of Lansing. Under ordinary circumstances she would have turned to this letter first, but her grief led her to think first of the immediate family affairs. But her anger rose almost at the first line of Lansing's letter and when she had finished her dark eyes flashed with resentment.

"I came to see you and you had left, knowing that I would be here in a few days, without even writing me," ran the letter. "You are taking too much interest in your family's affairs, and always have. As soon as a girl becomes engaged to a man she should consult him in all matters. He should begin to advise her then and get her in line with his idea of thinking to save trouble in the future.

"Your training has been such, or ought to have been such, that you should understand that the man is the lord of his home; he is everything, and the woman should bend her ways to fit his whims. I believe that is the way your mother's side of the house, at least, consider things; and, as your father was reared in the same family, your inherited inclinations as well as your teaching ought to enable you to understand this. I believe in the old law of the man assuming the head of the family as its real lord and master, and not in the modern idea that woman will submit to this when it pleases and rebel when it does not.

"I feel that I have made sacrifices enough by forgetting your family tree, and some of the disagreeable things surrounding the home, without making so many

others. To be plain, either cut out those home people or cut me out. A woman's heart is not large enough to hold a place for her husband and carry the troubles of her family besides. And, what about that Rob Ray stuff in the newspapers? I am told that you left here with him directly after the article appeared!"

Nevada thought of trying to sleep at first, but she found that she could not sleep with such a letter unanswered. She wrote the answer, stamped and addressed it at the time so that she would be certain not to forget to give it to Robert Ray to mail for her.

The letter was brief and two extracts will show how she disposed of Thomas Lansing:

"I have never thought that you cared for me in the way that I was supposed to consider it. I know that I have never cared for you as I should for the man whom I expected to marry. I was under obligation to you, and am still, I suppose. You aided me to enter the Indian school. You really suggested it, I believe, and your intentions were doubtless of the best. I am not ungrateful for this, though I wish I had never heard of civilization! I would not have known of the trouble that awaited me, and is now upon me. At least, I would certainly have not felt it as keenly as I do now. I do not believe we owe you anything in dollars and cents, and if we did, it would be very unfortunate, for we are in most desperate financial straits, though Mr. Ray is trying to aid Father, as usual.

"As to our engagement, it has not gone so far that I shall hold it binding on you. And as for myself, I shall resort to that old legend of Mother's tribe,

which holds that a suitor must offer a price and pay it for his squaw. You have not paid for me, and I now, on behalf of my father, declare the transaction closed! As to the reference to Mr. Ray, I may as well relieve your mind on the subject once and for all. I can assure you that he never has thought of me as a sweetheart. He loves Ruby Mooring and she loves him. They will get married very soon. That newspaper item was an invention of the editor's brain."

All were aroused next morning by loud knocking at the door of the house. When Robert Ray opened the door he found a young Indian waiting, and the burro which he had ridden was standing near. The native tried in his own tongue to explain to Ray. But failing in this he said in broken English:

"Mokava, he almost dead! Where Tehana?"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAND OF FIRE

“**H**OW are you fixed for oil and gasoline, Mr. Chauffeur?” asked Robert Ray.

“All right—I was caught on the desert once without either gasoline, oil or water, and that was sufficient. Ever since I have carried a cargo of each on a trip like this!”

Nevada had come to the rescue of Ray as soon as she was dressed and had gotten the details of the messenger's story. It was Bill, the oldest son of the Chief of the Land of Fire. He told about finding the body in the sands two days before, and of the things that occurred after the rescue. He said that the man was better the next morning, but he could neither talk nor see. He kept making signs to the effect that he had left somebody or something behind, and wanted some one to go in search.

Smoke had been seen that morning curling in the form of a spire high in the sky above the place where Mokava had once lived—the house which the messenger had now reached—and the Chief of the Land of Fire interpreted it as a sign of the return of Mokava and Tehana to the old home. He also concluded that after their return Mokava had decided to visit him and had lost his way on the desert. The Chief of the Land of Fire was desirous that the unfortunate condition of Mokava should be reported to

Tehana. He knew that the victim could live only for a few days, at best, and had consented under such urgent circumstances that Bill might bear the message to Tehana. Under no other condition would he have permitted his successor as chief to brave the sands of the Land of Fire.

When asked by Nevada if there was any way to reach the place in the automobile, Bill said a wagon could make it around the south end of the desert and reach the place in three days. He said the wind was now blowing the sand from the foot of the mountains on that side and that the ground would be bare until the wind changed. But he shook his head and grinned when he looked at the automobile. He had never seen one before, and he had his doubts about such a thing being drawn over there by burros in any way.

Nevada, with the aid of the Indian, pointed out to Ray and the chauffeur about where the home of the Chief of the Land of Fire was situated. Bill directed their attention to a landmark high up on the mountain and told them that his home was on a straight line beneath it, behind the great bosom of the desert which bulged out on the horizon like the skyline of the sea.

"Tell him to leave his burro and get in the auto and pilot us," instructed Ray.

"He says he can't do without the burro; that they have just lost one," explained Nevada, after talking with the Indian. "He says that all we have to do is follow the foot of the mountain around the circle of the desert to reach the place; that we can't miss the way."

"Tell him I will give this for his burro, and he may leave the animal here with the chance of getting him again," said Ray, showing a twenty-dollar gold piece.

Bill's eyes bulged with surprise. Then he turned and looked at the automobile for a moment with suspicion. But after Nevada had explained about the machine and how it was being universally used he reached out greedily for the money and took it. Nevada explained that it was the first time the Indian had ever seen so much money before, and while he was very much in doubt about them being able to make the trip in the automobile he had decided to take a chance.

In the meantime the chauffeur had secured a supply of water, and with the guide to his right and Nevada and Robert Ray in the rear seat, he pulled out for the trip around the desert. It was like circling a blind bay of the ocean, where the centuries of sea have cut into the land. Though it presents the outward appearance of a safe harbor, the mariner who accepts the invitation from a storm is likely to go with his craft to destruction.

They hugged the shore to their left and made good headway in the beginning. They found that the Indian was right about the wind favoring them, at least for the first few hours. Outside of the difficulty of getting around the sloping rocks that extended themselves into the plain from the mountains like huge roots from a tree, they met with few obstacles until the approach of noon. The wind was carrying

the tide of restless sands steadily back to the great sea of their kind to the right.

But with the approach of noon the wind began to change and increase its force, and the circular course which they were following had brought them more directly in its teeth. Their trouble soon began. The hot sands and sweltering rocks were yielding so much of their heat as the burdened gusts would accept and the travelers were subjected to a blast not unlike that which comes from a furnace. Another turn of the coast-like trail and they were facing, directly, the gale of alkali dust and sand.

To the right the sand dunes appeared to move, by reason of the disturbance of their surface by the wind, and the whole presented a succession of variegated objects and shadows not unlike the billows of a storm-swept sea. Upon these danced sand-pillars and twist-ers, standing, quivering for a time in place and then jumping to another point like a flash, always subject to the vagaries of the unsettled gusts.

Then a heavier gale than usual would hurry them over against the shore of rocks, and they would break and scatter and fall to the ground in layers, building, building dunes until the wind should change and take them back to the ocean of sands again. This might begin within an hour, a day, or a week, or even longer time, but it would come; and the sands were buffeted back and forth in this manner as they had been day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, since time had reached this process in the course of the eternal.

Deeper and deeper the thin layers grew at the base of the shoreline, like a tide coming in from the sea, until the chauffeur found it difficult to make headway. At times his motor balked at the weight of the machine whose tires sank until the rims were hidden in the grinding, heated sands. At times he could move on by loosing the power in reserve. At others he had to lay blankets, which he always brought for the purpose when he came into the desert, along the ground in rolls in front of the wheels before he could drive over the growing dunes. In this way he was able to travel by slow stages. Then he was balked by high drifts where the blankets sunk under the weight of the car and he had to resort to shovels to extricate them.

Then a turn around the point of a cape which extended into the sea of sand and they were again on the clean-swept earth. The wind had been friendly here and cleared their way as clean as a floor. The machine would dash away like an animal suddenly unleashed and glide along like a dream, until another turn brought them in contact with the wind and sand again.

The sand was deeper each time and hotter from the more direct rays of the midday sun. The blasts of the wind came like a steady flame on the bare hands and faces of the party, and the heated grains of sand burned like coals. But in the midst of it all Nevada was composed, even talkative.

"I was told at school by descendants of the better tribes why this is called the Land of Fire by the

Indians," said Nevada, as they rested at noon. "But I have never properly understood it before. I thought most of the descriptions of this place were a myth—that it was like other desert countries. Now I appreciate its name and why my grandfather is called the chief of this desolate region.

"In olden times," she continued, after recalling what she had heard, "according to Indian legend, or history, as they hand these things down by word of mouth from generation to generation, it was a custom of many tribes when a member became unfit, by reason of crime or other violation of the unwritten laws or customs of the tribe, to continue with his people, to banish him to this, the country known as the Land of Fire. It was extreme and perpetual punishment. So long as he should remain here he was not subject to any other penalties. But should he return he was put to death.

"The story goes that many tired of the place after different periods and returned and accepted the death penalty rather than remain here. I can now understand why they did this."

"I agree with the judgment of those who went home and took their medicine," smiled Ray, whose tongue was so thick from the heat that he could barely articulate. "I beg your pardon," he continued, "but this old chief, your mother's father, I believe, must have handed down some of his determination to you."

"My grandfather was doubtless driven here for some tribal offense, but I shall now feel forgiving toward him. He has long since atoned for whatever

he did. He has outlived all of those who knew him in his younger days. He has been old ever since those now living can remember. After nearly a century in this place he deserves to be acquitted of further punishment, unless his crime is of greater enormity than any of which I have heard, either in the books of the white men or among the Indians. Then he is said to have saved many lives from those hot, seething sands over there, and that should count for something. My own father owes his life to him."

Shortly after they started out again they came upon another wind-swept strip of ground. The automobile was stopped with a jerk. Robert Ray looked out to ascertain the cause and saw the driver looking at a dark object projecting partially from the sands. It was to the right and near Ray, and he got out and drew the object from the dune.

"That is Mother's rifle!" exclaimed Nevada in a tense voice. "My dear, dear old Mother! She would not have abandoned the gun except in the direst straits. Let us get out and make search. We may find some trace of her. Oh, that she may have been fortunate enough to escape these terrible sands!"

They all alighted and searched the place in every direction, but found no other sign of the missing Indian woman. The sand had been swept back and forth until it had obliterated all evidences of her trail. But all people of the desert knew of the uncertainty of the course taken by one stricken by thirst and heat. After beginning to discard whatever burdens they may be carrying they often wander on for miles before

falling. And they knew that the Indian woman, if she had become separated from her burro, was just as likely to have started toward the center of the desert as any other direction, after she had abandoned the rifle.

"You never saw that rifle before," explained Nevada, in a sad voice, after they had started out again. "Very few people ever saw it. Mother always kept it in the tepee. She had it for many years. It is of the old rim-fire make, you will see. Father had a great deal of trouble in getting cartridges to fit it. Mother seldom used it, but she was a dead shot. Father would not contest with her, though he is an excellent marksman himself. She could come nearer the mark than he, even when she did not hit the cross. Dear old mother!"

Ray had been examining the rifle and casually ejected from it an empty shell. Tehana had doubtless fired it at the last extremity to attract anyone who might be in hearing. Then she had cast it aside and wandered on. He placed the shell in his pocket and heard it jingle against another. He took the two out. They were exact mates. The one already in his pocket had been introduced as evidence at his and Mokava's trial. He had found it at the rear of the old adobe the morning after the killing of Brush.

They reached the home of the Chief of the Land of Fire just before sunset. They were rounding the last point of rock which brought them in view of the house, when Bill, the guide, pointed to a little cove on the left and shook his head. The others looked and they

saw a new-made mound of earth. It had been rounded off within the last few hours.

"He dead!" said the Indian, as the automobile came to a halt.

"And we have lost both Father and Mother!" murmured Nevada. "Poor little Grant and Amosa!" she continued, repressing a tremor that would have shaken the whole body of a woman less able to control her emotion.

The chauffeur drove the automobile slowly to the front of the quaint old place of abode. They had scarcely stopped when Mokava came out and greeted them!

CHAPTER XXVIII

DISCLOSURES OF TWO WRITINGS

THE body of John Mooring had been buried in the little cove by Mokava and Indian Tom. Mokava had come to the end of his fruitless search a few minutes after John Mooring had passed away. He had found no difficulty in identifying the body of Mooring. The latter had passed thru a terrible ordeal while lost in the desert, and the heat of the weather made it necessary to bury him as quickly as possible.

Mooring had revived in the last struggle of life, which comes often just before death, and for a short time was in possession of his senses. He tried to speak, but his tongue and lips were a swollen mass. He tried to look about him, but his eyes had been deprived of their sight in the glare of the desert, and by the flying sands. He then motioned his hands as if he would write. But there was no material for his use. Then he seemed to recollect and picked feebly at an object tied with a string on the inside of the fragment of a garment which he still wore.

This was untied and removed by Indian Tom. It was a faded package and had writing on the outside, directing that it should be opened upon his death. It was given to the dying man. He clutched it with a contented look for an instant, then his grip relaxed.

This was followed by a convulsion and he passed to his reward.

It was while the Chief of the Land of Fire was mourning him as his adopted Mokava that the real Mokava appeared and identified the body of the dead banker. The aged chief then explained the arrival of his sons with the unconscious Mooring, the subsequent discovery of smoke in the sky above the old habitation of Mokava, and the sending of Bill to notify Tehana should she be found there. Mokava knew that as soon as Nevada should receive the news she would attempt to come to the place. He had done the only thing left for him—waited.

Night had set in. The meal which had been prepared by Nevada from the supplies brought along with them was over and they were seated outside the house in order to get the benefit of the night breeze. The old chief had been brought out in his chair, and he and Mokava were talking in the Indian tongue. Robert Ray and Nevada were sitting near the light issuing from one of the lamps of the automobile. Ray had asked to see the package which had been taken from the dead banker. They brought the wrapper and the contents. Indian curiosity had led them into opening it as soon as Mooring died.

Ray recognized the wrapper at once as the one on the package that Ruby Mooring had dropped when he met her at the Oakland train. It stated that it should only be opened at the death of Mooring, and since he was dead, Ray handed the writing to Nevada. She held it near the automobile light and read:

"I have lived thru life under an assumed name. In order to do justice to those who may have been wronged by my acts I am leaving this statement. My real name is not Mooring. My mother and father died on the plains while crossing when I was a baby. Members of the immigrant party took me and raised me. I was given their name—Mooring. But I took my right name after I grew up and was married under it. Then I got into financial trouble when my wife was about to become a mother. I took her to a maternity hospital and left the country. She died, but the baby lived. I never learned whether it was a girl or boy. I then changed my name back to Mooring. That was just before I met Annette. My real name is John Collins. John Collins, alias John Mooring."

Robert Ray rose to his feet. He walked back and forth as one stunned. He strolled farther and farther as he turned about until he found himself in front of the little cove that contained the new-made grave. Back and forth he strode. At times he paused as if he would go and tear the body from the mound. Then he stopped and trembled as if he would fall upon the grave and weep.

"Oh, God of Heaven!" he finally cried, "John Mooring was my father! Collins was my mother's name; that was the manner in which she was left. I was the baby that survived her! I was given the name of the people who adopted me. And Ru—by! Ru—by is my half-sister!"

It was early the following morning. The night had wakened the memory of the Indian chief for

more than half a century back. The explanation of Mooring's writing had recalled another writing to the memory of the old Indian which had been scrawled at his home in the years gone by. He called for the worn old trunk and had it brought and placed on a level by his side. After a long search he brought out a package of letters and papers. He separated them and looked at them one by one as he passed over them. Though he could neither read nor write he appeared to know each one by some peculiar mark which he had placed upon it, which he had retained in his memory all of these years. Finally he took one from the others and gave it to Nevada.

He explained that before the mother of Mokava had died, she, too, had written. She had not been so weak as Mooring when she was rescued, but had lived several days. The writing was in ink. With her and the child, Mokava, the trunk and the other belongings of the immigrants had been recovered. All of the things in the house had been brought in from the desert from time to time. But so dim was the writing that in places the imprint of the pen only remained. But Nevada soon proceeded to read:

"May the Lord provide for my children and bless these kind Indians. I cannot continue the struggle much longer, and I leave this as a record for my darling babies, should they survive. I was found by these kind people with my baby, William, after the other members of our party had perished. My husband had passed away shortly after we started out and my

other baby, Johnny, the twin brother of William, had been taken by another family, by the name of Mooring. I was too weak to care for both of the children. It was after the immigrant wagons became separated that all of our party perished except baby William and me. May this some day reach the eyes of some one who can read it, is my prayer. Mary Collins."

"Why, Mooring was your brother!" exclaimed Nevada to her father.

"And you and Robert cousins," said Mokava, proudly.

Robert Ray again arose and left the place after the reading of the dying woman's letter. He was climbing about the mountain in the rear of the home of the old chief, in a state of mental abstraction. The Indian, Bill, had followed him at the suggestion of Nevada.

"You mining man—I show you!" said Bill, after overtaking Ray. The Indian had been with the white people now until he felt more capable of conversing in their language.

He led the way to a ledge that protruded from the side of the mountain near a gulch. He pointed to a wide seam of quartz which showed, upon closer examination, thick clusters of gold. Ray looked at the outcropping with slight concern for a moment, and then turned and walked away, shaking his head.

"There is rich ore in place, but what is gold worth when the world has turned against you?" he murmured. "What does it all amount to, anyway? Why this joke we call life?"

When Ray later returned to the house he handed

Mokava some money. He told his friend to give the money to the old chief. He explained that the old fellow was in need and had done much for the suffering. The aged man refused in a modest manner at first, but finally clutched the money like a miser. With the twenty dollars Ray had already given Bill, the house of the Chief of the Land of Fire was now richer than it had ever been before.

The party left a few minutes later for the return trip around the sea of sands. Although they had abandoned hope of finding Tehana, her husband kept a steady lookout from his seat by the side of the chauffeur for some trace of his squaw. When they came to where the rifle was found on the previous trip another search was made at the request of Mokava, in which all joined. But it proved fruitless. The sands had taken their toll.

But Mokava's hopes were revived when they came in sight of his old house at the foot of the mountain. Night had just set in, and through the open door they saw a bright light.

"Tehana! She there!" shouted the old man with the delight of a child.

"Thank heaven!" joined Nevada.

But another disappointment awaited them. When they drove in front of the place, Grant came out of the house, cautiously and sullen.

"Why you here—where Amosa?" asked Mokava.

"Amosa at school," replied Grant. "I'm tired of the place."

The chauffeur offered to attempt the trip to camp

that night, assuring Ray that he could find the way, and suggesting that it would be cooler traveling by night. But Ray directed that they should spend the night in rest and continue the journey next day.

But on the following morning Grant refused to accompany them. He would look in the direction of the town of Mokava and shake his head negatively when they suggested the return. No persuasion or threats by Mokava would change his mind.

"Then I stay, too," said Mokava. "One enough to lose out here—but maybe Tehana come yet!"

"I will remain with them!" affirmed Nevada, and neither Mokava nor Ray could get her to change her mind.

Robert Ray was in no hurry about leaving. He spent considerable time arguing with Grant in the attempt to persuade him to return, but failing, received some letters from Nevada to mail, gave to Mokava a roll of money, over which the latter protested, and he and the chauffeur started out leisurely for the town of Mokava.

"No hurry," said Ray often during the day. "Get in after dark, but measure your time so as to arrive before the night train leaves."

As they were approaching the town shortly after nightfall they noticed that the glimmer of a light shone only here and there.

"Oh, that light-plant is out of commission again!" remarked Ray.

"There's been a fire!" exclaimed the chauffeur when they reached the main street.

They stopped the machine and looked about into the darkness. It was like the desert again.

"Yes, the city hall stood over there," replied Ray.

"There is only a pile of ashes and the pillars left of it now," said the driver.

As they moved on they discovered that the Casino Annex had also burned. The old rockhouse and the adobe only stood on the former site. Then as they drove slowly around the corner they discovered that the bank building was the only one left in that portion of the town. Brush's old gambling house had perished with the whole block in the flames. The school building up on the side of the hill was missing from the sky-line.

"Drive near the old—Mooring home," said Ray.

He had climbed over in the seat with the driver. When they were near the place Ray saw a light through the window. He placed his hand on the driver's arm and stopped him. As they sat there in silence Ray could hear the beating of his own heart. Then it leaped with a heavy, sickening throb. Ruby Mooring passed by the light and came to the window. She leaned against the sash and looked longingly out into the darkness.

Ray crouched down into the seat. But again and again he turned his eyes in the direction of the form at the window.

Then he saw her walk over to a center table. She picked up a picture. Ray knew from the shape of the frame that it was the picture of himself. She looked at it for a long time. Then she pressed it to her lips.

"Poor girl!" he said in thought speech. "I will—no, no, no, my God, I can't!" Turning to the driver he said in a low whisper: "Crank up and take me to my room as quickly as possible!"

Ray's rooming-house had also been spared by the fire. He turned to the chauffeur when they reached the place, paid him for the services of the trip, and said:

"Say nothing of what you have seen or heard. I shall deem it a great favor if you keep a still tongue."

"An old taxicab driver of San Francisco with eyes and ears?" replied the chauffeur with a tone of injury in his voice. "That is the first lesson in our work. We neither see nor hear! While we are in the employ of a person our silence about his affairs is as binding as that of a priest in the confessional. It is to bed with me just as soon as I can get ready for it."

"Wait a minute," instructed Ray. "Go and ascertain if Miss Martin is still here, and how the fire started."

The chauffeur entered a saloon that had been set up in a tent on the burnt district, and after a few minutes returned.

"The teacher left for home the night after the fire, and Mr. Stallings is taking care of Miss Mooring," he explained. "The fire broke out early the night of the day we left, just after the train came in."

"Thanks," replied Ray, handing the chauffeur an additional sum of money. "And now I know why Grant refused to return," he continued to himself.

Robert Ray entered his room quietly and packed

such of his belongings as would go into his suitcase conveniently, and which he thought he would most urgently need. The others he threw back into his trunk. Then he sat down and wrote two letters, looking at his watch at intervals.

One of these he addressed to Horatio Stallings. The other was to Ruby Mooring. The latter ran as follows:

"Dear Ruby:—I have never realized before that I was such a coward. But I am the weakest coward on earth, and I am bound to confess it. I have learned something that has killed all of the man in me. It has shattered every hope. I am left the mere image of a man without the elements that go to make one.

"I have pondered over the matter two nights and days and have tried to nerve myself back to a man again, see you and tell you what I am now about to write.

"It seems stranger than fiction. It is all stranger than any true thing that ever happened before. How will I begin to tell you? When I reached the new home of Mokava I found Nevada alone. Tehana was not there when she and Mokava arrived, and Mokava had gone to search for her. The morning after my arrival a messenger came from across the desert—the place they call the Land of Fire—and said that Mokava was dying at the home of an old Indian chief, known as the Chief of the Land of Fire.

"I was so sorry for Nevada in her distress that I employed the chauffeur to undertake the journey to

the bedside of Mokava. We had an awful experience on the way, but that is neither here nor there, except that we found evidence to the effect that Tehana had doubtless lost her life.

"But imagine our surprise when we reached the home of the old chief! Steel yourself for the sad news! The man whom the messenger said was Mokava proved to be your father! He had lost his way on the desert, was overcome and was brought in by the Indians. Mokava had arrived at the place directly after the Indian who came to us had left, and recognized the body of your father. He had died in the meantime. Mokava and the young Indian had buried the body before our arrival. The weather was so warm that they had to hurry the body into the ground, although Mokava expected Nevada to return with the Indian messenger.

"Before your father died he directed their attention to that faded little package which was still on his person. They had opened it and it contained a writing. I am herewith inclosing it. As you will see, his name was not Mooring, but Collins. My God, Ruby, my name before I was adopted was Collins! He was my father, and you are my sister! Poor girl, how shall we bear it?

"I had built up such hopes since the night you consented to be my——! I cannot bear to look upon you as my sister. I am such a coward. I must run, run away and try to forget!"

Then he explained about the old letter left by the mother of the twins, Mooring and Mokava, which

also showed conclusively that the original family name had been Collins.

"Now, dear Sister," he concluded, "be strong, stronger than your brother. Forget! I have written Mr. Stallings to turn over what money I have left to you. I have sufficient with me to take me wherever I decide to go. It may be to South America, Mexico, Cuba—wherever railroads and steamship connections may first speed the way.

"The money which Stallings will turn over to you should keep you moderately until you——marry, at least. Seek your mother and care for her, too. Our father was to blame for it all. But let us forgive him. Take Stallings' advice about everything. If he were not quite so old I would suggest——It is nearly time for the train. I came after night so that I could get away without any one knowing I was here. The chauffeur is a silent man.

"If I can ever forget and come to realize that you are my sister, only, I may try to find you. But I do not believe that I shall ever wish to see you, except as I see you in my mind—the Ruby that said that night: 'Yes, Robert!' It is one of those epochs which comes once only in a man's life, and it is hard to erase it from the memory. Good-bye!"

When the engineer blew the warning signal of departure, Ray grabbed his suitcase and rushed away without disturbing any one. He ran by the post-office, which had escaped the conflagration, and

dropped the letters addressed to Ruby and Stallings into the mail box.

He boarded the rear coach as the train was leaving, secured a berth and went to a sleepless bed.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PROSPECTOR

“**M**OVE on there, Slim! You, Blackey! Jumbo, are you trying to force a dry camp? There’s a spring of cool water ahead, and a big feed coming—giddap, all of you!”

The man wore ten weeks’ growth of beard, and his hair hadn’t been disturbed by a barber for a month longer. He was driving two burros, which were heavily packed, and rode another of gigantic proportions. They were in a broad, sandy plain. There was not a sprig of grass so far as the eye could see, and the quivering heat glistened white as isinglass in the burning sun.

Water? There had not been a sign all day, save that which was in the canteen of the prospector, and it burned his lips whenever he was forced to take a swallow. And that came pretty often, as the sun and dust were absorbing every particle of moisture in his body.

But the burros plodded along as if they were surfeited with both water and grass, and such elements were foreign to their desires. It had been a steady job with them, but one to which they were accustomed. They were veterans of the desert. Why should they hurry? Their instinct from past experience told them to take their time. What if they should reach water and grazing that night? What

if they should scent it or see it just ahead? Probably the following morning they would receive a heavier pack and start out again toward a more barren region. Running water and green fields were disappearing visions as they had been vanishing realities.

The few years of their lives had taught them that running water and green fields only portended longer journeys and heavier burdens. While out in the regions of the wild there was rest, often long rest, if they did have to forage on dry bunch-grass and drink slimy alkali water. But they had become accustomed to it, and such fare in freedom was preferable to green grass and spring water with the prospect of starting out with burdens that would almost break their backs.

This had been a long journey. Spring was budding, where there were things to bud, when they started, but summer was on now, with all its desert fury. Across the Arizona portion of the Mohave desert after they first started out; then over the Panamints to Death Valley; there a long rest—if a burro can rest while he browses on the scattering growth of such a country, parched by the sun, and where he has to wade through sand dunes at that for hours for every meal, while he fights off myriads of flies that wait for him when he goes to the water-holes to drink.

Then, just when they had become accustomed to this life, and when the provisions which they had carried on their backs for their master were about exhausted, instead of coming out with empty packs,

they were loaded with samples of ore which nearly broke them down, and had to struggle along with these for several days through a sea of sands before they reached water at the foot of a barren mountain. Here they had been given a night and day while their owner rested.

Then they climbed out over the mountain and struck out on the broad desert again. It was in this seemingly unlimited expanse that they ignored the command of the bewhiskered and travel-worn master to "giddap!"

But if burros could talk, and Slim and Blackey and Jumbo should each detail their troubles, they would be mere pastime compared to the story that their master could tell. With weighted down heart already when he started out, he had met the requirements of the prospector's life on the trail. He had saddled and packed three burros each morning while they were on the road. He had unsaddled and packed them again at noon, and unsaddled and unpacked them again at night. But this is only a beginning.

He prepared his own meals nights and mornings; ate stale bread and raked the maggots from his bacon at noon; made his bed with a blanket on the ground; watched the burros throughout the night to see that they did not desert him; kept his aching body still for fear that any movement might bring the fangs of a rattlesnake; changed hands when he drank from his canteen because of the heat of the tin; swallowed the water with wide-open mouth to create a miniature process of cooling by absorption.

Then for one whole month he had drilled, drilled, drilled and blasted rock alone. The burros at least were company for each other, and they seemed to have a way of communicating among themselves, but their owner had not seen a living being with whom he could converse; he had heard no voice save his own. He was so lonely, and so tired of the monotony of his life, and the company of his burros, that the sight of a desert lion or a skulking coyote was a relief, and he would rather have made friends with them than harm them. They were all out there on an equal footing, each trying to get what he could from the great, dry, unyielding desert.

"Giddap there, burros," again said the prospector through force of habit.

"Giddap," again he said. But this time he had caught the sight of green leaves and he knew he was nearing his destination for the day.

"Giddap, I say, burros, don't you see that green over yonder—the broad, green leaves laughing just over the rise? There is a spring beneath them; and green grass near by, if I'm not mistaken. Anyway, there is a feed for us all over there!"

The dust-covered and sweat-stained burros and the dust-covered, bewhiskered prospector plodded on for another hour. But this was a short time to the man. He had been for ten weeks remote from green trees and human habitations—he had seen them only in the mirages of the desert. But now he knew the place and knew that within a short time he would descend a hill down into a level where once there was

a meadow. The man bent forward and tried to urge the big burro beneath him and talked to the other burros more kindly than he had for days, but they moved at a snail's speed.

They came to a trail that led along the side of a barren hill. The hill was almost as tall as the cottonwood trees in the plain below. The man stopped the burro he was riding and looked down, while the other two kept on. An abandoned telephone pole stood out alone like a sentinel; another leaned at an angle half-way to the ground across the way; the front wall of a building still stood near an old graded street; the side wall of another building towered to the left; portions of two walls stood over to the right, and there was a window-sash in one of the walls. But the glass was gone. There were foundations of buildings here and there, and pieces of scantlings lay about the ground with boards and planks, all intermingled and scattered like debris in a storm-path.

Down among the trees there was a low, rock house and an old adobe at the rear. The trail led to these, and the prospector again urged his burro forward. The other two animals had preceded them, and an old man with long whiskers and uncut hair came out of the adobe. He first scrutinized the burros and their packs closely and then began to look about for their owner. As the latter rode up the settler greeted him with a warm welcome.

"Get off burro and rest. I take off packs for you."

It was not necessary for the prospector to ask for

permission to remain over night. It was the custom to entertain any who might come that way without question. It was a pleasure. A visitor once a year was above the average. And, besides, it was a long distance to another camping place where there was water and grass.

While the elder man was unpacking the two burros in silence and the stranger was unpacking his own and looking about the place, still indulging in his habit of talking low to himself about what he saw, a young woman came out of the rock house. She would have been taken for thirty, but she was much younger. The sun had tanned her face and arms, and her dress, though clean, made no pretense to style. She watched the two men in silence for a while and then asked:

"Have you inquired of the gentleman what he would have for supper, Father?"

"No, I forgot! You ask him yo'self, Nevada," replied the old man.

"Anything you have," interjected the stranger. "I have been eating of my cooking, as you must know—many weeks at that—and anything that a woman should prepare will be a treat."

"Won't you suggest something? Father recently returned from the trading post, and, while our menu is not very large, we have a number of things that a traveler on the desert might relish," explained the woman.

"Give me something like you gave the chauffeur and me at the old place, on the other side of the mountain, about five years ago," said the prospector.



"IT IS ROBERT, FATHER, ROBERT RAY!" SHE EXCLAIMED.



The elder man stopped unwinding the rope from about the burro and pack and looked at the visitor in silence. The woman walked over to him, and, after a moment of scrutiny, she circled him about the neck with her arms.

"It is Robert, Father—Robert Ray!" she exclaimed.

There were late hours at the home of Mokava that night. Even Mokava wanted to talk. But Robert Ray had so many pent up things which he wanted to let out to human ears, and wanted to know so much about what had been going on in the outside world since he had left it, that he monopolized the most of the evening, with people that knew but little more about it than himself. He wanted to relieve his soul of its overcharged burdens; he wanted to hear voices of others. The solitudes of the desert had made him hungry for companionship, but he was hungrier still for information that, somehow, he dreaded to learn.

He had spent a month at the old home of the Chief of the Land of Fire. He had found it abandoned. He had found another grave by the side of that of his father and rightly guessed that it contained the remains of the ancient settler. He wanted to know about Bill and Tom; Amosa and Grant; Stallings and—Ruby. All of these subjects he approached hurriedly until he came to ask about the latter.

"I have at last found a mine," he had begun. "One that needs no advertising or stock-selling. I had been everywhere and had done about everything. Made a stake one day and lost it the next; tried half a dozen things, but eventually failed in them all; worked for

wages by the day, week and month, but wound up with barely enough to last until I got another job. A ledge which Bill had shown me near the home of his father when we were there five years ago haunted me all of the time. I earned enough to buy an outfit after I returned from across the Mexican line and started out across country from Arizona to the old home of the Chief of the Land of Fire.

"I crossed the desert on the other side and circled the high mountain in the rear of the place by the trail which Bill and Tom had made when they went out and brought in supplies. I intended to take them in on the claim, but when I found they had gone I set to work alone. I picked and drilled for a month, saving the high-grade carefully as I went along. After satisfying myself what a fortune lies back in the ledge I packed the high-grade on the burros, posted the claim and gave it the name of the 'Fire Chief Lode.'

"I came by the old place on this side of Death Valley expecting to find you there. But after finding it vacant I rightly guessed that you moved back to the old home."

"Poor mother was never heard from again," explained Nevada, while her father was outside looking after the burros. "The burro which she rode returned to this place later and we recovered him after about two years."

"When did you return?" asked Ray.

"Two years after you left. Father made a trip over for supplies. The old route on the other side was so long and difficult that he decided to try the town of

Mokava, much as he despised the place. But he found when he arrived here that there was no town and went on to our old post on this side for supplies. When he got this far with them he left them and came for me. So we moved back.

"There was nothing but the old rock house and a few scattering walls of buildings when we came, besides the railroad tracks. But the railroad men came later and took up the tracks and left us cut off from the world about as you first found us, except that our family was broken up."

"What became of Bill and Tom?" asked Ray.

"Why, you and Father spoiled them," continued Nevada. "That money you gave Bill and his father turned the heads of the young men. They had saved the money that you and father gave them, and had the most of it when their father died. After his death they started out to try to get more. They had learned while on a trip out for supplies that they had some rights against the government. They went to the reservation which had been allotted to the descendants of the tribe from which their father had descended to secure their share. They never returned. But on their way out they came this way and Grant went with them. He was never satisfied here, and Father thought it just as well to let him go along with Bill and Tom."

"And Amosa is married! She fell in love with a full-blooded Indian at school and after the wedding they went to his reservation to live."

"Did you ever learn what became of Stallings and——"

"Ruby," interrupted Nevada. "Yes. Ruby is married, too! She and Mr. Stallings went away together on the last train that left the place. One of the men who came to help tear up the tracks was a brakeman on the last train that went out, and he saw Ruby and Mr. Stallings.

"Ruby married a preacher, a man much older than herself," continued Nevada. "Amosa told Father about it. He went to Amosa's wedding. I didn't go. There would have been so much to explain about that Lansing affair. I closed the engagement with him in that letter you mailed for me. He threw up my parentage to me, and I was glad to break with him. I didn't care for him, I discovered, and besides I owed my life to my father.

"But—I was talking about Ruby," she continued, noting the impatience on Ray's face. "Amosa told father that Ruby and her husband—a preacher—came to the Indian school about a year after Ruby left Mokava. Ruby sang at the service which her husband held, and he was very devoted to her. Stubborn Amosa refused to meet Ruby, though Ruby was anxious to talk with her. Amosa held the old school matter against Ruby, as she did against everybody in Mokava. Ruby and her husband left the same day."

"Did you learn the preacher's name?" asked Ray.

"No, she did not tell father. She did not remember. So many preachers visit the school from different denominations, and the children so abhor having to

listen to them that they forget them very soon. Well, if Father isn't dozing!"

They looked up at the clock.

It was two in the morning.

CHAPTER XXX

REV. HENRY GWYNNE

WHEN Robert Ray left Nevada and Mokava he had made up his mind to look for Ruby. The five years of wandering had changed him in many ways. He had absorbed some of the hard things which he had encountered. He realized now that when he had fled from the meeting with Ruby that night on his return from Death Valley he still was in his boyish stage. He thought at the time, however, that he was a man in experience. But the shock of the disclosures contained in John Mooring's last statement, and the hard life of the years which followed, had brought him to a knowledge of the fact that men do not know when they have reached the age of discretion.

He knew a lot more now, it was true, but the dread of meeting Ruby had never passed. He could not realize that she was his sister, even in the face of the overwhelming evidence. He could not bring himself to feel that they were from the same flesh and blood. He had often hoped that there was a mistake somewhere, but whenever he recalled the statement of his dying father and the other circumstances surrounding the case he had to admit that there was no escape from it. Neither did Mooring seem like his father at first, he reasoned, but now it was a fact beyond further question. It was quite natural that Ruby should not

take her place in his heart as a sister so quickly after what had happened between them. But he would be a man now and go and seek her and give to her a brother's protection.

But she was married, and, perhaps had children; and, yet there was no absolute certainty of this. It had come through the gossip of Indian children. Who was the elderly minister? It could not be Stallings. It was thought that he had been a lawyer. According to the report from the Indian school Ruby had married a minister who was much older than herself. She would not have been there with any other, and at the same time be devoted to another who was not her husband, except to Stallings.

After reaching the railroad he had put his burros in a pasture and shipped the high-grade by express on the same train which he took for the smelter. It was richer than he had even suspected. He had been led by the peculiar circumstances surrounding the death of John Mooring, his erring father, to a deposit that would yield to him a fortune. He was not a believer in predestination. He had always taken a practical view of things. He did not believe that fate entered into the ordinary things of life.

Although the two hundred pounds of ore which he had brought to the smelter had been selected, he knew that the run of the vein would yield at least fifty per cent as high as the picked samples. He did not admit to Nevada and Mokava that the results of the smelter test would have a great deal to do with his immediate plans. He had exhausted his funds and did not know

what his next turn would be, should his judgment of the value of his mine prove faulty. He had determined never to accept an accounting from Ruby, married or single. He had wiped out his account with the town of Mokava and did not care to even know how it stood. He had smiled at the legend told by Nevada of her father failing to pay for his squaw, and everything and every one in contact with him being doomed to failure, but he had washed his hands of it all, and did not propose to soil them again with any of the proceeds of the transaction. He had a property now that would yield real gold and it appeared inexhaustible.

He walked away from the smelter feeling that he soon would be a rich man. He was already rich, for present purposes, and knew that his new property would yield more when he was ready to take it. The result of the reduction by the smelter had filled his pockets abundantly for present needs.

"First a visit to a barber and a clothier," he said, glancing into a mirror, "and then the search for Ruby. I will discard my youthful sentiment with these old clothes and hair and beard, and become a practical man. I shall learn to like my elderly brother-in-law. He may be in need. Ruby shall never want."

Two plans for finding Ruby suggested themselves. If he could find Stallings, doubtless he could give him the name of her husband and their address. If he failed to find Stallings then he would have to go to the Indian school and try to secure the name and address of the minister who had visited the school.

He took rooms at the hotel where he and Stallings

had stayed when they were on business for the banking house of Mooring & Brush. After he had been transformed from the desert prospector to a neatly dressed mine owner, he began the search for Stallings. The hotel people nor the bankers knew nothing of him. They had about forgotten him, except the bank remembered that they had a block of Burro Hill stock that they had received through Stallings in settlement of claims against Mooring, and that it was worthless. But they held no grudge on this account. It had been a plain business transaction in which their judgment had proved at fault. Then he tried the directories, and no such name as Horatio Stallings appeared.

He took a train to the Indian school. Here he encountered more difficulty. There had been scores of visits by ministers of different denominations who sought to establish their belief with the Indian pupils, but no one remembered either the date or name of the man for whom Ray was searching. Besides, there had been changes in the employes at the agency from time to time, and but little account was kept of the visits of ministers.

Then Robert Ray informed them that he knew Nevada and Amosa. This enlisted interest. A girl who had been a friend of Amosa now remembered the date, by reason of the fact that it was her birthday, and Amosa had spoken of knowing the woman who had accompanied the minister. The superintendent went to the records again and found that on that date the "Rev. Henry Gwynne" had held services in the chapel. Amosa's friend knew that he was the man, for the date

was right, and Amosa had spoken of his companion as Ruby and would not meet her because she disliked the father of the visitor. But she could not describe the minister, except that she remembered that he was much older than his wife, and they had arrived and left on the same day.

Robert Ray returned to the city and began searching directories for the name of the Rev. Henry Gwynne. His name was not in the city directory, but he finally located the Rev. Henry Gwynne as being a pastor of a church in the suburbs. He had been engaged in traveling missionary work prior to his call to the charge of the small church and his name had escaped the directory. It was late in the evening when Ray made this discovery through the head officer of a church, and he delayed his trip to the suburbs until the following afternoon.

When he came to the number to which he had been directed he found the name of "Rev. Henry Gwynne" written on a card on the door, and his cowardice came back. He hesitated to ring until he was discovered by a woman in the place, and it was then too late to retreat. He rang, and to his relief a middle-aged woman came to the door.

"Is the Reverend Gwynne at home?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"No, sir; he is in the city—will not return until evening," was the pleasing reply.

"Is Mrs. Gwynne at home?" he asked, deciding that it would be a good plan to meet Ruby alone.

"No, sir; neither is Miss Gwynne," explained the

maid. "Mrs. Gwynne is with her husband, and Miss Gwynne is at school—she will be home shortly after three o'clock."

"I will call again," explained Ray as he left the place without giving his name.

"Miss Gwynne!" he soliloquized. "At school! Why, they couldn't have been married much over four years? Oh, yes; I see. The preacher was married before. 'Miss Gwynne' is Ruby's stepdaughter. Oh, I have it now. I'll go back after the stepdaughter comes from school and get it all untangled before Ruby and the parson return. That will be a good way to break the ice in advance."

Robert Ray called again a little after four o'clock and rang the door bell.

"Miss Gwynne is here now—would you like to see her?" asked the maid.

"If you please," replied Ray.

"Then come in and be seated. She has just come, and will be out in a few minutes," she explained, showing Ray to a chair.

Robert Ray had scarcely seated himself when he caught a glimpse of a woman through a door which was slightly ajar. Her back was toward him, but he recognized her.

"Oh, heaven, it is Ruby, herself!" he said to himself. "What does it all mean? Miss Gwynne—Rev. Gwynne and his wife in the city! Has he just adopted her after all? What has become of Stallings?"

The old feeling came over him again.

"She's my sister!" he whispered.

He wanted to run away, but it was now too late. They would not understand. They would think he was a criminal or a lunatic if he rushed away.

"No, she's my sister, sister, sister!" he kept repeating to himself.

Ruby entered the room.

"Why, Robert!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms.

"Do not get excited—I know I should not have come without first letting you know! I did not intend to do so," he stammered.

"That's all right—I am so glad you have come at last! It has been so long—Father always said you would come, but he is so sanguine, you know, and has so much faith in you," said Ruby, withdrawing from his arms and standing back at a distance while the blood returned to her face.

"Your father—faith in me? I do not understand—where did I ever meet him?" asked Ray in a half-dazed state.

"Here he comes now—oh, Father, Robert is here!" she cried, her eyes filling with tears of joy.

Robert Ray turned and saw Horatio Stallings coming toward him.

"Where is Mother and—?" inquired Ruby.

"They stopped for a moment at our sick neighbor's," interrupted Stallings.

"Father, tell Robert, he doesn't know yet," smiled Ruby, wiping away her tears.

"She is not your sister, my boy—she is my daugh-

ter! She was not even related to John Mooring," explained Stallings.

Robert Ray stared at the speaker as if he thought he was mocking him. Then he glanced about the room, examining every detail of the interior, as one would do if suddenly awakened in a strange place. His eyes fell upon Ruby again. Then he looked first at her and then at Stallings.

"Can this be true—is this true, Ruby?" he finally asked in a hollow voice.

"Yes, it is true—all true!" she exclaimed, facing him and placing her hands upon his shoulders.

"Can you ever forgive me?" he asked.

"I have, already," she replied.

"Yes, she has watched every hour of the day, and into the night for you," replied Stallings. "She searched the newspapers, looked into faces on the streets, watched arriving and departing trains, even looked into the air, I believe, for you! She refused to touch a cent of your money which I gave to her, and has taught school, is teaching now, in order to save it until you should come. She has traveled about the country with me, wherever I went, hoping to learn something of you. She went to the Indian school with me a few years ago thinking that she might get some news, and the little girl of Mokava snubbed her for her pains."

"Would you run the risk of letting your daughter become the wife of the son of John Mooring?" stammered Robert Ray.

"Wait a minute, they are coming—get their consent, too," interrupted Ruby.

The woman whom Robert Ray had known as Mrs. Annette Mooring came into the room, followed by a neatly dressed man who was past the middle age. Annette was much changed in appearance. She was modestly dressed, and her eyes wore a look of tenderness. Her face was wreathed in a smile that comes only from a soul that has atoned. She ran to Robert Ray and placed her arms about his neck.

"I might as well explain now," began her husband. "My name is not, and never was, Horatio Stallings. I am Henry Gwynne. Mooring took my wife and baby from me while they were at a summer resort and I was at home, a young minister engaged in my work. I had never seen him. But I found a picture which he had taken of them at the seashore, and followed with this slender clue until I gave up, went to the bad and degenerated into the Flunkey you first met at the railroad camp. It was there that I discovered Mooring. It is a long story, but it is over now. My sins and those of Annette have been forgiven. I have forgiven everybody as God has forgiven me!"

"Then you will risk your daughter with the son of the author of all of this trouble?" repeated Ray.

"Neither was he your father," replied the minister.

Ray looked from face to face with still greater bewilderment.

"This is your father, Robert," continued the minister, pointing to the man who had come into the

room with Ruby's mother, and who now came forward.

"Yes, my son, but I did not desert your mother," began the stranger, as he grasped Ray's hands affectionately. "Within the hour after I left her at the hospital I was seized in the dusk of the evening near the water-front and taken aboard a ship bound for Australia, and was forced to work as a common sailor. After many months I made my way back and ascertained the fate of your mother. I also learned that you had survived, but could get no trace of you at the time. After years of search I accidentally met with the Reverend Gwynne here. He told me that you were last seen about five years ago, and doubtless was still alive. I have since lived in his home, under his assurance that you would some day return to Miss Gwynne."

"It is all true, my boy," corroborated the minister. "I have verified every detail of the transaction. It was only a case of similarity of names and circumstances. He is your father!"

The eyes of Ray and Ruby met. He opened his arms and she rushed into their clasp.

THE END.

YB 32518

M18930

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

